

Freethought Today

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June / July 2016

Reason Rally 2016



Photo by Andrew Seidel

FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker (far right) speak to the Reason Rally crowd on June 4 in Washington, D.C.



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF Communications Coordinator Lauryn Seering holds up a "Fan of Reason," given out by FFRF to Reason Rally attendees.



Photo by Chris Line

A Reason Rally attendee holds up one of FFRF's "Unabashed Atheist" signs.



Annie Laurie Gaylor's and Dan Barker's speeches

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Nonbelief Relief aids imperiled activists

Nonbelief Relief has recently aided seven nonbelievers whose lives have been threatened in Bangladesh.

Nonbelief Relief, a charity founded by FFRF last year, wired stipends of \$5,000 each to each of the seven activists, who have been typically described as "Bangladeshi bloggers." They include three students, an employee in a local business, and professionals with diverse backgrounds. They range in age from teens to mid-30s. As of this writing, none is yet safely out of the country, so identities cannot be divulged.

All seven are on a "hit list" believed to be produced by Muslim extremist groups. All have publicly stated their nonbelief, whether on Facebook, blogs or other social media. All have been tailed or followed by as many as three men at a time with "radical" appearance and received online threats. The stalking of one blogger in the past few weeks has escalated to the point where he's gone into hiding until he can emigrate.

"Dhaka now feels more dangerous than a war zone to me, after a spate of machete attacks by Islamist groups," one of the Bangladesh nonbelievers wrote recently to Annie Laurie Gaylor, administrator of Nonbelief Relief and co-president of FFRF.

See Activists on page 6

FFRF court victory

Texas county settles quickly after suit filed

A federal lawsuit filed by FFRF and two local plaintiffs over Latin cross decals on a Texas county's patrol vehicles has been settled in FFRF's favor.

Brewster County has officially consented to remove the religious decals (and not display them in the future) and to reimburse legal fees for the attorneys.

"We are very delighted that our lawsuit has been resolved so quickly and amicably," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "The five Latin crosses on the sheriff's vehicles were taken down almost immediately, which was a good faith effort by Brewster County to make sure they were not proselytizing the public through the Sheriff's Department. We knew very early in March that reason and the U.S. Constitution would prevail."

The two local plaintiffs — Kevin Price and Jesse Castillo — were each awarded nominal damages of \$1. FFRF was rep-



Latin cross decals recently adorned several Brewster County (Texas) Sheriff's Department vehicles. The decals have since been removed after FFRF filed a lawsuit against the county.

resented by its Staff Attorneys Sam Grover and Patrick Elliott and by Texas litigator Randall Kallinen. Gaylor said it's believed the county judge would sign a settlement awarding FFRF approximately \$14,000 to cover its legal fees.

The suit was precipitated by Brewster County Sheriff Ronny Dodson's

announcement last December that he "wanted God's protection over his deputies" in deciding to place the prominent crosses on at least five county law enforcement vehicles. The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court, Western District of Texas, Alpine Division, on March 2.

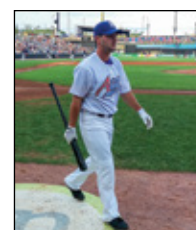
Prior to the lawsuit, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott defended Dodson's actions and even submitted a legal memo to state Attorney General Ken Paxton erroneously insisting that Christian crosses may be legally displayed on sheriffs' vehicles.

Brewster County is located in the western part of the state, with a population of less than 10,000. Its county seat and only city is Alpine. According to the Texas Observer, the county is the largest in the state—"five times the size of Rhode Island, three times the size of Delaware and 500 square miles larger than Connecticut."

Inside This Issue



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Removing prayer from graduation
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Meet a staffer

Name: Amit Pal

Where and when I was born: Emden, Germany, where my father worked as a naval architect. We moved to the United States when I was a toddler and a decade later to India. I returned to the United States as a young man, and so here I am!

Education: I double majored in geology and chemistry at Lucknow University in India. I then completely switched tack, getting a master's in journalism from UNC-Chapel Hill and a master's in political science from North Carolina State University.

Family: I have a lovely and loving wife, Deepa, to whom I've been married for more than a decade. We have two wonderful daughters, Sagarika, age 13 (already freethinking in all sorts of ways!), and Devika, who is 11.

How I came to work at FFRF: I was with The Progressive magazine for a long time here in Madison, and was familiar with FFRF and its work. When I transitioned out of the magazine and saw a job opening here, it seemed a natural fit.

What I do here: As the communications director, I write press releases, communicate with the media, send out weekly reports to members, and help with staff writings, other mailings, and, with lots of delight, Freethought Today.

What I like best about it: Getting my writing and editing creative juices flowing; the niceness of my colleagues.

What gets old about it: Having to fight similar state/church battles over and over again. In my few months here, I'm already noticing a recurrence of



Photo by Jake Swenson

the same sorts of violations, with minor variations.

I spend a lot of time thinking about: How this world should be a more just, rational and reasonable place.

I spend little if any time thinking about: What awaits us in the afterlife.

My religious upbringing was: Hindu.

My doubts about religion started: When I couldn't make myself believe even as a kid that a religion supposed to be taken seriously would have such awfully silly priests as its guardians and interpreters.

Things I like: Good books, good movies, good music and a good game of squash.

Things I smite: Typos, ill-informed opinions and a refusal to see reason.

In my golden years: I hope to travel around the world AND catch up on all my reading. (Is it possible to do both simultaneously?)

Overheard

The rejection of facts, the rejection of reason and science — that is the path to decline. It calls to mind the words of Carl Sagan, who graduated high school here in New Jersey. He said: "We can judge our progress by the courage of our questions and the depths of our answers, our willingness to embrace what is true rather than what feels good."

President Barack Obama, giving the commencement ceremony at Rutgers University
CBS News, 5-15-16

Confessional states end badly. I believe that secularism accompanied by a strong law which guarantees religious freedom provides a framework for moving forward.

Pope Francis, addressing Christian worries that Islam is becoming more widespread, especially in Europe
French Roman Catholic newspaper La Croix, 5-16-16

In the early 2000s, I began predicting that the battle over gay marriage was already over. My conservative friends called me crazy, but time proved who was right. Because conservative Christians seem hellbent on perpetually making the same mistakes ad infinitum, today I'm predicting that the transgender conversation is over. And once again, conservative Christians will be the authors of their own demise.

Jonathan Merritt, senior columnist for Religion News Service
Religion News Service, 5-14-16

We're not going to discriminate when it comes to immigration based on religion.

Rep. Don Beyer, D-Virginia, who authored the Freedom of Religion Act bill, which would keep religious tests out of the immigration process
ABC News, 5-11-16

FFRF runs 2 new ad campaigns

FFRF ran a pair of full-page newspaper ad campaigns recently on the need to vote for candidates who'll get religion out of government and on what the bible says about abortion.

The first ad campaign asked the question, "What does the bible really say about abortion?" The answer is (as the ad puts it): "There is no biblical justification for the assault on women's reproductive rights."

Those ads ran in the Austin American-Statesman, Tulsa (Okla.) World, Houston Chronicle and Wichita (Kan.) Eagle on Sunday, May 22, and earlier in the Austin American-Statesman. See the ad on the outer wrap of this issue of Freethought Today.

The ad features a compelling portrait of birth control crusader Margaret Sanger, and her quote: "No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body." It documents that the bible does not condemn abortion and, in fact, "shows an utter disregard for human life." The ad reminds the reader: "We live under a secular Constitution that wisely separates religion from government, and protects women's reproductive rights."

Lydia Todd was so excited when she saw the ad in the newspaper, she wrote to us telling about her reaction: "Thank you so much for that ad in the Tulsa World. My mother had left it on the kitchen counter for me to see. I was so thrilled by it that I woke everyone in the house yelling about it. I learned that my sister had the same reaction — complete with waking others. I must become an official member now, and so must the rest of the household. Thanks on behalf of my fellow godless Oklahomans! That ad means a lot and is truly comforting for atheists living in a backward Southern hellhole."

FFRF welcomes 'Immortals,' 19 new Life Members

FFRF is happy to announce and welcome its 19 newest Lifetime Members and three new "Immortals."

Allen Dines, Celeste Smither and Patrick Van Fleet are FFRF's newest "Immortals," a designation for those very kind members who have contacted FFRF to report that they have made provisions for FFRF in their estate planning.

The new Lifetime Members are: Roberto Alaniz, Larry W. Allen, Dion Baran, Jr., Kenneth Blair, Ilse Buzzanca, Rolf Carlsten, Jim Day, Shaun Howe, Charles Krause, Vu Le, David Nohle,

The ad is funded and was largely written by Brian Bolton, a retired professor and Life Member of FFRF, in memory of FFRF's principal founder Anne Nicol Gaylor (1926-2015), who was propelled into freethought activism by her experiences working to legalize abortion in the late 1960s and early '70s.

FFRF warmly thanks Bolton, who lives in Texas, for his generous support and commitment. Bolton also sponsors FFRF's annual graduate student essay contest. Brian urges other members to help place ads promoting FFRF in Anne Gaylor's memory.

National ad blitz

Timed with the June 4 Reason Rally in Washington D.C., the second set of full-page ads — featured in three of the country's foremost newspapers — to promote FFRF's groundbreaking "I'm Secular and I Vote" campaign. The ad appeared in The New York Times on June 2, USA Today Weekend on June 3-5 and the Washington Post on June 5. View the ad on Page 19 in this issue.

The ad also focuses on the new lawsuit that FFRF has brought against the U.S. Congress for denying its Co-President Dan Barker a chance to give an atheist invocation.

As the ads point out, congressional prayers are extremely sectarian, with Christians comprising 96 percent of officiants, even though a quarter of the American population is nonreligious. "Shouldn't the House of Representatives be Representative?" the ads ask.

Congressional prayer also costs U.S. taxpayers a good-sized bundle. Approximately \$800,000 of tax dollars maintain a staff for two Christian chaplains whose major purpose is to open the House or the Senate with a prayer.

Britt Ochester, Nick Peterson, David Quintero, Michael D. Reardon, Dr. Randi Rubovits-Seitz, Tom Shire, Edward Staton, and Anna O. Zacher.

States represented are California, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin.

Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000 designated as a membership or membership renewal and are tax-deductible for income tax purposes, as are all dues and donations to FFRF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

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(608)256-8900 • FAX (608)204-0422

Editor: PJ Slinger, *fttoday@ffrf.org*

Editor Emeritus: Bill Dunn

Executive Publisher: Annie Laurie Gaylor

Graphic Designer: Jake Swenson

Contributors:

Philip Appleman, Dan Barker, Sarah Barrios, Eric Jayne, Chris Line, Amit Pal, Lauryn Seering, Andrew Seidel, Stuart Watson, Maddy Ziegler

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A Note to Members

Your address label shows the expiration date of your membership in FFRF, which includes your subscription to Freethought Today and "Private Line." If it says May or earlier please renew! Your prompt renewal (\$40-single membership; \$50-household; \$100 gung-ho; \$250-sustaining) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. Freethought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in January/February and June/July.

Send membership or renewal to:
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Outfront Media

FFRF ran a two-week ad campaign in Washington D.C., featuring ads on buses, kiosks and signs. Pictured on this bus is Sarah Lewis, a grad student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

FFRF places ads on D.C. buses, kiosks

'I'm an Atheist and I Vote'

Nonbelievers took over the transportation system in the nation's capital for two weeks leading up to the June 4 Reason Rally.

Capitol Hill employees rode to work in commuter buses wrapped with a giant message stating, "I'm an Atheist and I Vote." Downtown commuters who drove or rode Capital BikeShare were greeted by illuminated kiosk ads featuring young, millennial atheist voters. FFRF placed ads on 40 bikeshare kiosks and 20 Metro Light street signs, plus two D.C. commuter buses.

The ads were part of FFRF's campaign to highlight the exploding secular voting demographic in advance of the Reason Rally and the June 14 presidential primary in the District of Columbia. The ads ran from May 23 through June 6.

"We blanketed the District with images of young secular voters, to show the faces of the fastest-growing voter demographic in America," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "While the Religious Right is hemorrhaging numbers and influence, secu-

lar support is skyrocketing, with 20 million new people on our side of the aisle since Barack Obama was first elected. Our leaders needed to see our presence and hear our priorities."

The bus and kiosk ads were part of FFRF's campaign to engage millions of nonreligious voters and ensure the voices of the fastest-growing minority group in America are heard in the 2016 presidential election.

FFRF has been working with its 23,800 members, 20 chapters across America and through secular student

alliances to encourage supporters to register to vote, participate in influencing public policy and make a secular voice heard.

FFRF recently released a survey of nearly 8,000 members that showed 96 percent are registered to vote — more than 20 percent higher than the population at large. Respondents listed abortion rights, civil rights, women's rights, environmental protection and marriage equality among their top concerns, in addition to separation of state and church.



Outfront Media



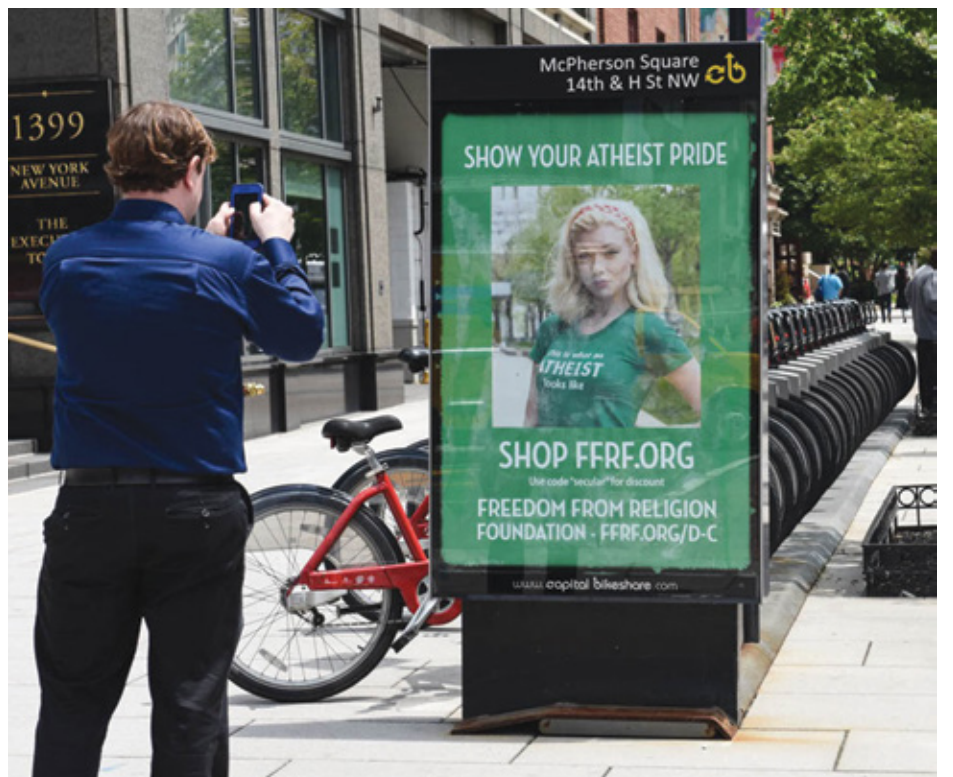
Outfront Media



Photo by Annie Laurie Gaylor



Photo by Andrew Seidel



Outfront Media

Clockwise, from above left: FFRF Legal Assistant Calli Miller and FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliot are featured on a pair of ads on a building in Washington, D.C. More ads featuring Sarah Lewis and FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel are seen on another building. A passerby snaps a photo of the FFRF Shop kiosk ad featuring Miller. Seidel stands next to the ad featuring his photo outside a D.C. building. FFRF Co-President Dan Barker reacts to seeing an ad kiosk of the FFRF Shop, featuring Elliott.

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

SATURDAY, IN COLOR

Kids in pink pajamas sit enraptured
As wily mice outwit the wicked cat
And brainy bears elude their human captors
And scrappy rabbits hit back, tit for tat.
The moral, in the land of Krispie Krunchies,
Is worms can turn, and bullies get the worst,
That little lads can land the lucky punches—
In short, that nice guys always finish first.

But after lunch their Dad kicks off his Loafers,
Tunes in to his reality, and swears
As Tigers gobble up the gallant Gophers
And Purple Panthers maul the Golden Bears.
Real heads are busted with Dad's benediction,
Hard knocks are what he recommends for schools.
And yet his fight is far less fact than fiction:
Those busted heads are busted by the rules.

In prime time Mom refuses to despair if
Some grimmer truth comes at her with a jolt:
If Robin Hood is gunned down by the sheriff,
The Noble Savage slaughtered by the Colt,
If war erupts again in crimson mayhem
And God is out there somewhere, loading dice—
For slowly surely Saturday's next A.M.
Is rolling 'round again, with all those mice.

© Philip Appleman.

From the book *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie*.



Philip Appleman is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His published volumes of poetry include *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems: A Satirical Look at the Bible* (2012), *Darwin's Ark* (new 2009 edition) and *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* (2009). His nonfiction work includes the widely used *Norton Critical Edition, Darwin*, and the *Norton Critical Edition of Malthus' Essay on Population*. His newest book is *The Labyrinth: God, Darwin and the Meaning of Life*. His poetry and fiction have won many awards, including a fellowship in poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Humanist Arts Award from the American Humanist Association and the Friend of Darwin Award from the National Center for Science Education. His work has appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, *The Paris Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Poetry*, and *The Yale Review*.

He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both "After-Life" Members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Phil's books: ffrf.org/shop.

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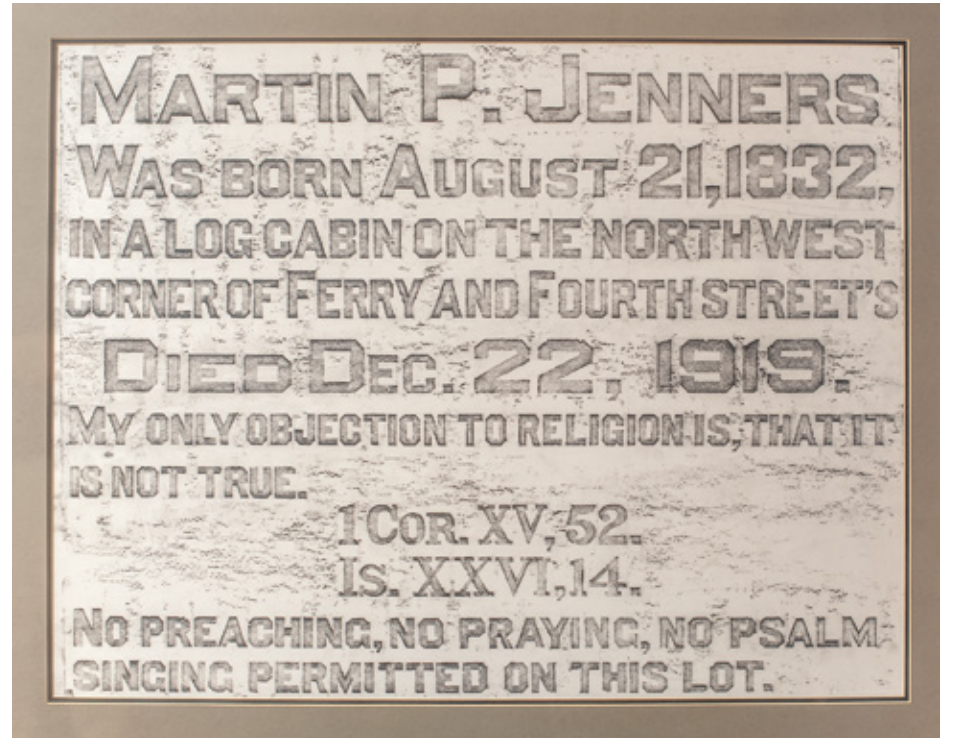
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PRODUCED BY THE FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

HOSTED BY DAN BARKER AND ANNIE LAURIE GAYLOR

Slightly irreverent views, news, music and interviews



FFRF member Jim Goble, who died on Dec. 3, 2015, gave this framed gift to FFRF, writing on the back: "After I die, please crate this up very carefully and send it to the Freedom From Religion Foundation. It is from a gravestone at Spring Vale Cemetery, Lafayette, Ind. I want it to go to someone who wants it for the same reasons I have enjoyed it so very much for many years." It is an elaborate rubbing from the gravesite.

Tombstone created outrage in 1906

James C. Jewell, instructor at Illinois Valley Community College in Oglesby, Ill., wrote this in the late 1980s regarding Martin Jenners' grave marker:

"One of the most frequently visited graves in Indiana is that of Martin P. Jenners in Spring Vale Cemetery. Visitors come to the Tippecanoe County gravesite to see what Laurie Jensen, writing in the *Lafayette Journal and Courier*, called the inscription that is 'his unique legacy.'

"Jenners' 'My only objection to religion is that it is not true' is a defiant declaration of his beliefs. Jenners' statement created an outrage in turn-of-the-century Lafayette when his headstone was erected in 1906.

"Thirteen years before his death, Jenners had his headstone erected at Spring Vale Cemetery.

"In addition to his statement of objection to religion, Jenners had two

biblical references inscribed on his stone. The first, 1 Cor. XV, 52, from the New Testament, reads, 'In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.'

"Apparently Jenners used the second biblical quotation, Is. XXVI, 14, from the Old Testament, to reveal a conflict in biblical teachings. The quote is as follows, 'They are dead, they will not live; they are shades, they will not arise; to that end thou hast visited them with destruction and wiped out all remembrance of them.'

"Jenners' stone ends with the almost alliterative command that 'No preaching, no praying, no psalm singing permitted on this lot.'

"Martin P. Jenners remains as unique and eccentric in death as he was in life."



Photo by Mark Welty

What could be worse?

Life Member Mark Welty sent us this photo from Cedar Falls, Iowa. "We've probably all seen this before in collections of funny phrases from church bulletins, but here it is, right on a church sign!" Welty writes. "I'm wondering if they don't realize it has a double meaning."

Meet a member

Name: Stephen Gay.

Where I live: Fountain Hills, Ariz., and part-time in Santa Rosa, Calif.

Where and when I was born: Houston in July of 1957.

Family: I am single, but have a wonderful sister, Patricia Williams and her family in Sonoma County. My deceased brother's wife and daughter live in Sao Paulo, Brazil, where I grew up. I moved my mom out to California four years ago as she is almost 90.

Education: Graduated from American Graded High School in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 1975. Graduated from University of Texas with a degree in accounting in 1979.

Occupation: Airbus A320 Captain for American Airlines.

How I got where I am today: My father was a CPA with Price Waterhouse in Sao Paulo. I lived there until going off to college. Growing up in Brazil, I became fluent in Portuguese and have a passing knowledge of Spanish. I also became a big fan of soccer, and saw Pele play live on many occasions.

The other big advantage of growing up abroad was seeing another culture up close and how the "other half" truly lives. One of our homes was in a very nice neighborhood, but we had a small slum immediately on the other side of our property. (Zoning laws need not apply!) We came back to the U.S. every two years or so, and I came to appreciate why a lot of people want to move here.

I followed in my dad's accounting footsteps, but my heart just wasn't in it. Dad, on the other hand, loved accounting like Mozart loved music. So I went and found something I liked doing and settled in on computer sales.

Flying has been my passion since I was a kid. Flying to the U.S. on Pan Am's iconic 707 Clipper Jets, and a fortuitous meeting with a Continental Airlines captain revived the dream after a few successful years in computer sales.

I finally made the break in 1989 and left to become a professional pilot. My path included five years as a flight instructor and charter pilot, followed by three years flying for a small regional airline. In 1997 I was hired at a Phoenix-based airline called America West, which through two mergers became American Airlines.

I have been a captain on the narrow-body Airbus fleet for 12 years now, and with American may have the opportunity to fly wide-body aircraft overseas.



Stephen Gay is a pilot with American Airlines and finds great value in practicing meditation.

Where I'm headed: With just six years until retirement, I plan to move permanently to Santa Rosa, buy a Piper Cub and give Sonoma Coast/Bay Area aerial tours along with taildragger flight instruction. I also plan to start a Freethinker/Atheist Meetup group and grow it to regional prominence.

Person in history I admire and why: Anybody who has had the courage to stand up and make a difference. There are countless of those through history, of course. This includes almost every freethinker of note, especially up to the 18th century, where speaking out could and often did cost you your life.

If I could be indulged with two choices from the recent era, I would pick Steve Jobs and Christopher Hitchens.

During my time in computer sales, I saw Jobs introduce a stunning array of products and life-altering ideas — things like typesetting fonts for the common man, the mouse and the computer/cell phone for the masses. Most people forget the Apple Newton, which started the whole PDA revolution and preceded the Palm Pilot.

I admired Christopher Hitchens for his intellect and sheer breadth of knowledge. His anthology of essays "And Yet . . . Essays" and "The Portable Atheist" are required reading in my book. I could listen to him speak for hours and not get bored. Hitchens made atheism respectable and fun. I was really sad to see him go so soon.

A quotation I like: "Aging is an extraordinary process where you become the person you always should have

been." — David Bowie

These are a few of my favorite things: Flying, of course, and photography. My subjects are generally aviation-related and nature, mostly flowers. I make greeting cards, fine art and wall-size prints with my various Epson printers. I have won awards for my photography, and have been occasionally published, including in USA Today.

I recently took up guitar after a 40-year hiatus, and enjoy that immensely.

Despite not having kids, I absolutely adore them for their innocence and joy. The most enjoyable part of my job is giving cockpit tours to kids. One dad filmed his two kids getting a tour from me, and the YouTube video he posted has received over 25,000 views.

I am godfather to three wonderful kids.

I read a lot of books on atheism and freethinking. I also devour political coverage on TV (MSNBC, mainly) and on the web, with a fondness for state-church issues.

Like Sam Harris, I practice and find great value in meditation. I was attracted to Zen because of its totally non-theistic, nonspiritual and nonreligious approach to seeing the world as it is, without stories or filters. Zazen (seated meditation) is a liberating practice because nothing that arises in your mind during those 30 minutes of silence is judged bad or good. By simply observing and releasing what arises without judgment, our unending torrent of random thoughts gradually loses its grip on us. What is left is the inherent kindness in reality, or what is actually

going on.

These are not: Creationists, fundamentalists of any stripe, authoritarians, but above all else, people who don't use reason to reach conclusions and who remain rigid in their thought process. Birthers and climate change deniers rank right up there.

My doubts about religion started: Pretty early. I remember asking my mom in third grade about a Jewish classmate of mine. I asked if he was going to hell because he didn't believe in Jesus. When she said yes, something shifted for me at a very deep level. There was no reason why Howard should go to hell just because he was Jewish. He hadn't done anything wrong! He was a wonderful kid!

From then on the contradictions just kept growing, like barnacles on the underside of a ship. The home stretch began when I read "Who Wrote the Bible?," by Richard Elliott Friedman, a professor at San Diego State University. That's where I learned about real biblical scholarship. It absolutely blew my mind.

Before I die: Have kids late in life like Larry King?

Ways I promote freethought: As often as I can, I mention I'm an atheist, and I have a small group of freethinkers in the pilot group I correspond with.

As we all know, it's not always the best course of action to bring up lack of belief because of people's deep fears and misconceptions. I really try and keep it out of the cockpit because I wouldn't want the other pilot to rattle on about their Mormonism or fundamentalist beliefs.

I find the best way is to throw out nuggets every so often, and use humor as often as possible.

My cousin (who is on the ragged edges of faith already) knows I'm an atheist but had never heard about Elisha and the bears in 2 Kings. As I was telling the story, I said something like, "Elisha was being teased about his bald head by some 8-year-olds, so what was his only option? He picked up the Bat-Phone and told God to take care of those merciless kids. Pronto!" The moment I said "Bat-Phone" she broke out into one of those uncontrollable, unstoppable bouts of laughter, which caused me to join in. We haven't laughed together that hard in years. I'm pretty sure she will never forget Elisha and the bears!

FFRF member's work pays off

Iowa City proclaims Day of Reason

Freethinking activist Justin Scott has been busy these past few months. As we noted in January's Freethought Today, Scott met with all the then-candidates for president at various town hall meetings in Iowa. Since then, he has given a secular invocation (see transcript on page 21) and was able to get Iowa City to proclaim a Day of Reason.

Scott says that Iowa City is the third city in Iowa to accept a Day of Reason proclamation. The others were Cedar Rapids and Waterloo.

Scott sent out emails to 28 cities asking them for a Day of Reason proclamation.

"There have been a handful of cities that have refused to issue this proclamation with very little reason, without stating the specific reason, although

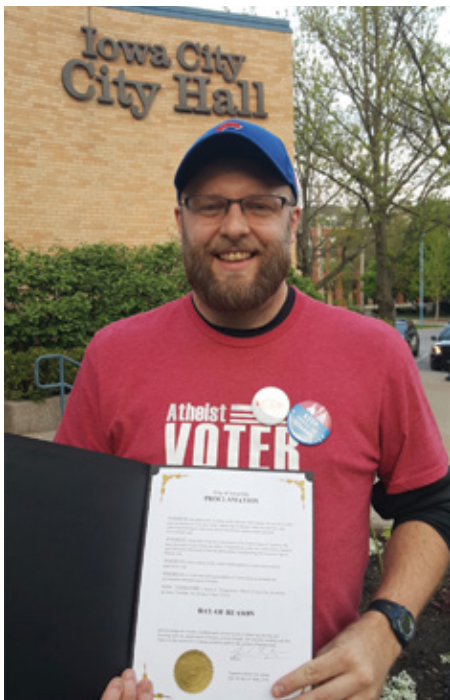
One mayor told me they 'don't want to stick their neck out there.'

they informed me that they have no actual procedure in place for proclamation requests," Scott said. "One mayor told me they 'don't want to stick their neck out there,' another told me they 'only like to work out of their comfort zone' on issues, and another told me that they would only issue this proclamation if '20 or so other cities did it first' because their city doesn't want to be the only one to do it."

Scott said Davenport has been one of the most difficult to work with, even

though the city has had Days of Reason in 2008 and 2011.

"I finally spoke to the mayor on the phone, after not responding to me for nearly a month," Scott said. "His initial hesitation was whether or not the proclamation had to include the word 'atheist' and that because two out of the 10 council members objected to it, the proclamation was considered 'controversial' and 'would require a majority vote of support' from the council. One Davenport council member even suggested that next year I collect signatures in support of my proclamation despite the fact that the city clerk, who has worked in the office for nearly 30 years, advised me that no other group has ever had to collect signatures to have a proclamation be issued."



Justin Scott shows off the Day of Reason proclamation he was able to get for Iowa City.

Pew Research Center surveys

Importance of religion in U.S. drops

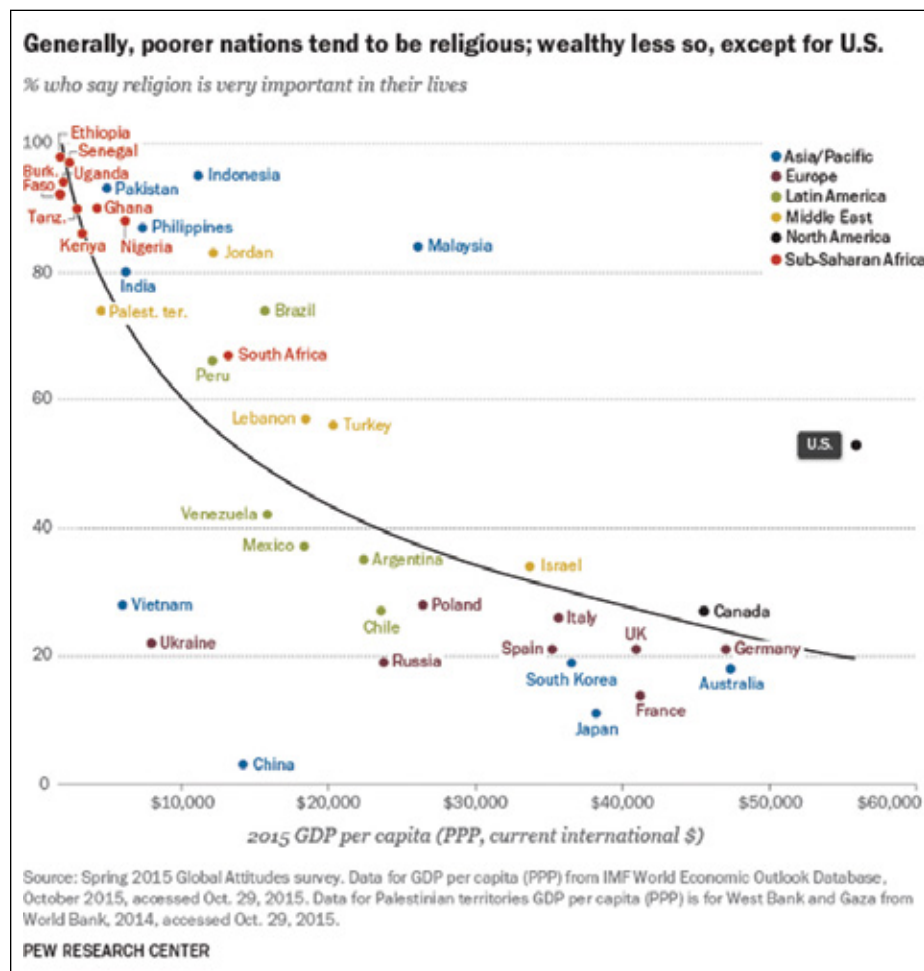
Only 53% of Americans now say religion is very important in their lives, according to a recent Pew Research Center report.

This figure has declined since 2007, when 56% said religion was very important in their lives. Americans are in the middle in terms of importance of religion when compared with people from other countries.

The share of Americans who say religion is very important is close to the global median of respondents who say this in a separate Pew survey.

U.S. residents place less importance on religion in their lives than do people in a many countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Almost all Ethiopians (98%), Senegalese (97%) and Indonesians (95%) say religion is very important, as do most Nigerians (88%), Filipinos (87%) and Indians (80%).

Meanwhile, religion is considerably more important to Americans than to residents of many other Western and European countries, as well as other advanced economy nations, such as Japan.



religion in one's life.

What does it mean to be "highly religious"? In Pew's analysis, it includes any adult who reports at least two of those four highly observant behaviors, while also not reporting a low level of religious observance in any of these areas, such as seldom or never attending religious services, seldom or never praying, not believing in God and saying that religion is "not too" or "not at all" important in their life.

Islam vs. government

The Muslim world is sharply divided on what the relationship should be between the tenets of Islam and the laws of governments. Across 10 countries with significant Muslim populations surveyed by Pew Research Center in 2015, there is a striking difference in the extent to which people think the Quran should influence their nation's laws.

In Pakistan, the Palestinian territories, Jordan, Malaysia and Senegal, roughly half or more of the full population says that laws in their country should strictly follow the teachings of the Quran. By contrast, in Burkina Faso, Turkey, Lebanon and Indonesia, less than a quarter agree. And in many of these countries where non-Muslims make up a significant portion of the population, there are strong disagreements between major religious groups on this issue.

For example, a 42% plurality of Nigerians think laws should not be influenced by the Quran, while 27% think laws should strictly follow the teachings of the Quran. However, among Nigerian Muslims, 52% say national laws should conform to Islamic law, compared with only 2% among Nigerian Christians.

Metro areas less religious

Nearly 70% of Americans consider themselves Christians. But some of the nation's biggest metropolitan areas have a very different look.

Only about half of the residents in the Seattle (52%) and San Francisco (48%) areas identify as Christians, as well as less than 60% of those living in Boston (57%) and New York (59%).

The Pew Research Center's 2014 Religious Landscape Study looked at the religious affiliations of Americans overall as well as those in all 50 states and the 17 largest metropolitan areas

in the country. While Christians make up between 65% and 75% of adults in most of those metro areas — and people with no religious affiliation generally make up roughly 20-25% of the population — some cities stand out.

Seattle, San Francisco and Boston are notable not only because they have relatively few Christians, but also for their considerable populations of religious "nones" (atheists, agnostics and those who say their religion is "nothing in particular"). A third or more of people in each of those metropolitan areas (37% in Seattle, 35% in San Francisco and 33% in Boston) are religious

"nones."

How religious is your state?

Mississippi, Alabama and other Southern states are among the most highly religious states in the U.S., while New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont and Maine are among the least devout, according to Pew's Religious Landscape Study.

Pew used four common measures of religious observance: worship attendance, prayer frequency, belief in God and the self-described importance of

Activists

Continued from front page

Another told Gaylor she is stalked from time to time as "an open atheist feminist writer," who calls herself an "online activist" and who uses Facebook as "my medium of choice to express my opinions and perspectives online with the world."

Another writes that since 2010, he has openly opposed "ongoing social problems like the killing of innocent people, rape and other evils," including blogging on women's rights and atheism. "I realized after the brutal murder of blogger and freethinker Avijit Roy that none of us is safe. The Islamic extremists are ready to kill us all."

Some of them have transferred offices, or moved around from relative to relative to evade stalkers. All were vetted and referred for help for Nonbelief Relief by Taslima Nasrin, the noted author forced to seek asylum in the early 1990s, following death fatwas pronounced by Bangladeshi imams. Nasrin is near the top of the hit list and was helped last year by FFRF's early Nonbelief Relief project to leave India, when death threats there escalated.

Since 2013, more than 13 nonbelievers have been slaughtered by Muslim terrorists in Bangladesh. The machete attack of U.S. citizen Avijit Roy in February 2015 — and attempted murder of his widow Rafida Bonya Ahmed,



Submitted photo
Activists, including one who has been aided by Nonbelief Relief, are shown protesting in Bangladesh. Their faces have been obscured to protect their identities.

who was grievously injured — was the beginning of a series of six cold-blooded daytime murders of freethinkers, most on the streets of Dhaka, through this April. Also hacked to death in April was Xulhaz Mannan, the first editor of an LGBT publication in Bangladesh, along with his friend. A third man was injured. Mannan worked at the U.S. embassy. A Bangladesh professor, Rezaul Karim Siddique, was hacked to

death in late April by suspected Islamic extremists, who issued a statement accusing him of "calling to atheism," although his daughter told the BBC her father believed in God.

"Freethinkers around the world cannot sit on our hands while those carrying the torch of the enlightenment are viciously picked off on the streets of Bangladesh," says Gaylor. "It's imperative we offer what assistance we can to

The Islamic extremists are ready to kill us all. — Bangladeshi activist

save lives."

Unfortunately the travel/relocation stipends are just the beginning of many hurdles facing these seven bloggers. They must obtain visas and either enroll in foreign schools or find employment. It's difficult to get permanent visas in India for Bengalis, so professionals in particular face so many challenges. Nonbelief Relief is making overtures to the State Department, which at this time has no policy to aid those on the hit list (numbering about 300).

Nonbelief Relief was organized to "remediate conditions of human suffering and injustice on a global scale, whether the result of natural disasters, human actions or adherence to religious dogma. Such relief is not limited to, but includes assistance for, individuals targeted for nonbelief, secular activism or blasphemy," reads Nonbelief Relief's statement of purpose.

You may donate to campaigns like this by earmarking "Nonbelief Relief" in your FFRF donation. FFRF's online donation form also has a designation for Nonbelief Relief, making your donation deductible for income-tax purposes.

In the news

School establishes chair for study of atheism

The University of Miami in April received a donation to endow the nation's first academic chair "for the study of atheism, humanism and secular ethics."

Louis J. Appignani, a wealthy atheist, gave \$2.2 million to fund the chair. The Appignani Foundation has given grants to many humanist and secular causes. The university will appoint a committee of faculty members to conduct a search for a scholar to fill the position.

The percentage of Americans who claim no religious affiliation has risen rapidly in a short time, to 23 percent of the population in 2014, up from 16 percent in 2007, according to a report by the Pew Research Center.

Religious freedom in peril around world

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom released its annual report showing that things are pretty bad worldwide.

"At best, in most of the countries we cover, religious freedom conditions have failed to improve," says Princeton professor Robert George, the USCIRF chairman. "At worst, they've spiraled downward."

The commission identified 17 countries as "Tier One" concerns, meaning they have "particularly severe religious violations of religious freedom that are systematic, ongoing, and egregious."

Egypt and Bangladesh are, in particular, noted as places where atheists have been targeted.

Tennessee sheriff sued over Facebook use

An atheist group has sued Sheriff Eric Watson and Bradley County, Tenn., for promoting Christianity and allegedly deleting critics' and unbelievers' posts on the sheriff's department's official Facebook page.

American Atheists Inc. and a Bradley County resident filed the suit in U.S. District Court in Chattanooga, claiming the sheriff's office violated their First Amendment rights.

They are asking a judge to stop Watson and his employees from proselytizing for Christianity on government social media and from censoring opposing viewpoints.

The lawsuit states that the department's Facebook page posted "He Is Risen" and a Christian message on Easter.

Justices punt on contraception case

The U.S. Supreme Court, in an unsigned unanimous opinion, announced that it would not rule in a major case on access to contraception, and instructed lower courts to explore whether a compromise was possible.

The case, *Zubik v. Burwell*, was brought by religious groups that object to providing insurance coverage for contraception to their female employees.

Less than a week after the case was argued in March, the court issued an unusual unsigned order asking the parties to submit supplemental briefs on a possible compromise. In the most recent ruling, the court said those briefs suggested that a compromise was possible, but that it should be made in the lower courts.



Photos by Chris Line

Food for thought

Top: High school students in Middleton, Wis., check out the pizza options brought in by FFRF recently to counter the "Jesus Lunch" held in the park adjacent to the school. The "Jesus Lunch" event was started in 2014 by a group of Middleton parents and involves parents passing out free food and having discussions about Christianity. FFRF objects to the event, saying it should be moved to an off-campus location, not the park, which is an official part of the school during school hours. Bottom: FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert (left) and FFRF Program Assistant Alyssa Schaefer prepare to hand out pizza to the students.

Banned priest now counsels pregnant teens

The Detroit Free Press reports that a "Catholic priest removed from churches in metro Detroit after he was accused of sexually abusing a teenager is now the development director of a new Catholic center" that counsels pregnant teenagers.

The Rev. Kenneth Kauchek was banned from public ministry by the Archdiocese of Detroit in 2009 after church officials determined he engaged in sexual misconduct in the 1970s with a 16-year-old girl he was counseling as a priest.

Kauchek is now a director at the Gianna House Pregnancy and Parenting Residence, which takes in teenagers and young women who are pregnant.

The God Delusion popular in Arab world

The Arabic translation of Richard Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion*, has been downloaded 10 million times, with 30 percent of those being downloaded in Saudi Arabia, according to Kacem El Ghazzali, writing in the Huffington Post.

"The book has prompted unprecedented controversy and debate in the Arab and Islamic worlds. The translator received death threats and accusations of conspiring with the Zionists to corrupt the youth," El Ghazzali writes. He was forced to close his social media accounts and stop posting for a while.

Futile attempts have been made to resist the waves of reason now reaching Arab shores, through toothless apologetic articles and books."

Nonreligionists a majority in England

In England and Wales, those who say they have no religion now outnumber those who claim to be Christian, a new report shows.

Nearly 50% of the population identifies as having no religion — referred to as "nones" in 2014. Those who define themselves as Christian — Anglicans, Catholics and other denominations — made up 44% of the population.

The new analysis from St. Mary's Catholic University in Twickenham, England is concerning to Christian leaders. The Church of England said it expected attendance to continue to fall for another 30 years as its congregations age and the millennial generation rejects organized religion.

Critic of Islamic extremism shot to death

Gunmen in Karachi killed a Pakistani activist known for campaigning against religious extremism and the head cleric of a radical Sunni mosque, police officials said.

On May 7, four men, riding two motorcycles, gunned down Khurram Zaki at a roadside café. Two others were injured in the shootings.

This was the third high-profile killing of a rights activist in Karachi

since 2013 and shows the significant danger faced by activists in a country troubled by religious extremism and intolerance.

Judge rules man must attend church

Instead of sending Jake Strotman, a Catholic, to jail on a misdemeanor attempted assault conviction, Judge William Mallory, a municipal judge at the Hamilton County Courthouse in Cincinnati, sent the 23-year-old Catholic to a Baptist church for 12 Sundays.

"I admire the fact that you want to spread the word of God because I'm a religious man, too," Mallory said. "Also the thing about religion, I think it is kind of personal and for me I don't try to impose my religious views on other people except for sometimes in this room."

Instead of getting 90 days in jail for his altercation at a Cincinnati minor league hockey game, Strotman was sentenced to attend 12 consecutive Sunday services at Morning Star Baptist Church. He was ordered to attend each entire 90-minute service and must get the weekly program signed by the minister.

Satirical drug challenges Muslim bigotry

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, launched a satirical public awareness campaign to challenge growing Islamophobia in America.

CAIR is distributing "Islamophobin®," a mock-medicine designed to "cure" Islamophobia. The mock drug is actually sugar-free-chewing gum.

The package states that the product is "Multi-Symptom Relief for Chronic Islamophobia" and claims the "Maximum Strength Formula" treats:

- Blind intolerance
- Unthinking bigotry
- Irrational fear of Muslims
- U.S. presidential election-year scapegoating

Religious Freedom Act may soon include 'nones'

The U.S. Congress is considering adding language to the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 that would include nontheists, humanists and atheists under its protective umbrella.

This would be a momentous signal to the international community that the "Nones" (those free from religion) are deserving of equal protection under the law and that discrimination against nonreligious people abroad will not go unnoticed.

H.R. 1150 passed the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously on May 16. You can make a difference by contacting your senator now!

California rejects credit for religious instruction

The California Senate on May 23 rejected a bill that would have allowed students unlimited time off from school and up to two elective credits toward graduation for private religious and moral instruction, the Sacramento Bee reports.

Senate Bill 1457 faced objections from Democrats, who argued that it would undermine the secular foundation of public education and violate the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution.

FFRF sues to remove Florida park cross

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, along with the American Humanist Association, filed suit against the city of Pensacola, Fla., to challenge a 25-foot-tall Christian cross in a public park.

According to the lawsuit filed May 4, the white Christian cross dominates Bayview Park, where it is maintained by the city. The cross is also the site of numerous Easter Sunrise services, frequently co-hosted by Christian churches. A plaque specifically referencing Easter sits at the base of a platform near the cross.

"There are tax-free churches throughout Pensacola where this pinnacle symbol of Christianity may be appropriately displayed," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. "But when a city park serving all citizens — nonreligious, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian — contains a towering Latin cross, this sends a message of exclusion to non-Christians, and a corresponding message to Christians that they are favored citizens."

But not everyone understands this. Florida state Rep. Matt Gaetz, who is a candidate for the U.S. House, wrote an op-ed in the Pensacola News Journal on May 15.

"We need leadership in Washington that understands America is a Christian nation founded on Christian values," an ill-informed Gaetz writes. "I hope you will join me in praying for



This 25-foot-tall Christian cross sits in Bayview Park in Pensacola. FFRF is suing to have it removed.

the courts to make the right decision and dismiss the lawsuit."

Gaetz also seems to think that majority rule should trump the Constitution.

"The extremist groups that filed this lawsuit . . . as well as liberal Amanda Kondrat'yev, who is running [against Gaetz] for the 1st Congressional District, make a mockery of the right to religious freedom. They do not share the values of Northwest Florida."

Kondrat'yev is one of the four individual plaintiffs in the suit. Gaetz has challenged her to a debate over the cross. No date has been set.

"The way I see it, having a cross in a park that's supposed to be for every-

body is obviously showing preference to one religion over another," Kondrat'yev writes. "If it were a satanic symbol or a Muslim symbol, they would be livid. . . . The cross towers above the trees and it's a clear violation of our constitutional rights. My grandfather and father are both U.S. military veterans, and this is not what they fought for at all."

The Pensacola News Journal itself took a stand against the lawsuit, using bizarre logic in its editorial on May 6.

"The Bayview Cross is not a government endorsement of religion," the editorial states. "It's simply there, and that's why it ought to be left alone."

But Brian Curtis, who commented on the online article, called the newspaper on its faulty reasoning.

"We'll see a good demonstration of just how religious it is as soon as the suggestion is made to take it down," he writes. "Suddenly the air will be filled with cries of 'war on Christianity!'"

For at least the past 15 years, the city has received requests from citizens to remove the cross. In July 2015, FFRF and AHA sent warnings to the city that the public display and maintenance of the cross was a form of religious endorsement by the government. The city did not respond to these complaints. The local plaintiffs are nonbelievers who feel marginalized and excluded by their government's display of a large Christian symbol.

The federal lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court, Northern District of Florida, Pensacola Division, asks the court to declare that the Bayview cross is unconstitutional. It also asks the court to require the city to remove the Bayview Cross and to prohibit displaying Christian crosses on public land in the future.

FFRF Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert and Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler represent the plaintiffs, along with AHA Legal Director David Niose and Senior Counsel Monica Miller. The case, no. 3:16-cv-00195, sits before Judge Roger Vinson, a Ronald Reagan appointee.

Appeals court panel hears Ten Commandments case

The case of a Ten Commandments monument on school property is back in court.

A three-judge panel in the Third Circuit Court of Appeals on May 19 heard oral arguments in a challenge to the monument in front of a high school in the New Kensington-Arnold School District in Pennsylvania.

FFRF and Marie Schaub, who is a parent of a student, appealed a district court decision last year ruling they didn't have standing to bring the case against the district. But now her daughter is in high school, so it is likely that standing will be granted in the case.

"I believe so, and the district would have a decision to make," district lawyer Anthony Sanchez told the panel, as reported by Brian Bowling of the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.

In its brief, FFRF points out that the plaintiffs were forced either to have "contact with an unwelcome religious exercise" or assume the burden of avoiding such contact. The plaintiffs had encountered the 6-foot,

2,000-pound monolith while attending school events prior to enrollment. Schaub ultimately refused to enroll her child at the high school because of the prominent monument in front of the school.

"Parents and students who have been injured by a school's religious practices must have access to the courts," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "We look forward to this case proceeding so that the school will be welcoming to nonreligious students."

Bowling reports that Superintendent John Pallone, an alumnus of Valley High School (now Valley Junior-Senior High School), said he "probably walked by the monument twice daily as a student and frequently since then as a school official." Despite the substantial size of the monument, Pallone embarrassingly called it "innocuous."

"Until this lawsuit was filed, I never even knew that monument was there," Pallone said. "It's so innocuous that I can't even believe that there's an issue



Photo by Eric Felack of the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

FFRF and a local member are trying to get this Ten Commandments monument removed from in front of Valley Junior-Senior High School in the New Kensington-Arnold School District in Pennsylvania.

about that monument."

Last year, a similar federal court challenge by FFRF and local parents and students ended with a court decision in FFRF's favor and removal of an identical Ten Commandments monument from a junior high school

in nearby Connellsville Area School District.

Schaub will be speaking about this case at FFRF's annual convention, held Oct. 7-9, in Pittsburgh.

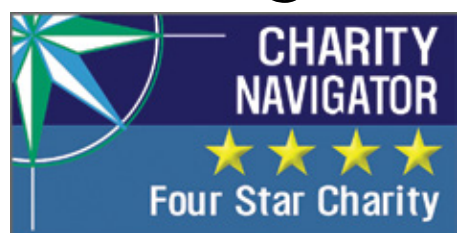
(See back page for full convention information.)

Nation's premier rating entity gives FFRF excellent grades

FFRF has once again received a stellar assessment from the country's premier nonprofit charity rating organization.

For the sixth consecutive year, FFRF has gotten four stars, the highest ranking from Charity Navigator in its just-released annual survey. Four stars indicate that the state/church watchdog organization is collecting and spending donation money in an exemplary way.

FFRF scores very well as compared to its peers in a number of categories. In the Human and Civil Rights category,



for instance, it has an overall score of 97.17, much higher than the average. Its revenue growth and program growth are three times the average, as is its net revenue for the year.

Similarly, in the Advocacy and Education category, FFRF's overall score

of 97.17 is once more much higher than the average. Its revenue and program growth are again three times the average.

And FFRF does superbly in comparison to other charities based in its home state, since its overall score is way higher than the Wisconsin average. And still again, its revenue growth and program growth are many times that of its peers.

In other key areas, its numbers are lower (better) than its fellow nonprofits. Its CEO compensation is tens of thousands of dollars less than that for

its counterparts in all three categories. Its fundraising expenses as a portion of its budget are a tiny fraction of the average.

"Charity Navigator issues the gold standard of nonprofit ratings, and so we are delighted that we've been rated 24 karat," says FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

"This sends an important message to all our members and donors that their donations are going to work for intended purposes and not for fundraising bells and whistles," Barker added.

FFRF news



Ben Hart poses with his Ohio "IM GOD" license plate.

Kentucky's rejection of license plate challenged

FFRF contacted the state of Kentucky on behalf of state resident Ben Hart after his application for a personalized license plate was rejected. Hart had the "IM GOD" license plate in Ohio, from where he recently moved to Kentucky.

FFRF asserts that the reasons cited for the Kentucky DMV rejection of "IM GOD" do not hold water. There is no legal precedent for the refusal, FFRF contends. The state has thus far defended the rejection on the basis that it doesn't meet a "standard of good taste and decency."

"The 'good taste and decency' restriction is plainly unconstitutional," FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote to Todd Shipp at the Kentucky Office of Legal Services.

The Kentucky Department of Transportation added that the "IM GOD" plate "would create the potential of distractions to other drivers and possibly confrontations." But the state can't impose a heckler's veto against speech with which some may disagree, FFRF says.

Summary judgment sought in nativity suit

FFRF, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the ACLU of Indiana are seeking summary judgment in a lawsuit challenging an annual nativity performance at an Indiana public school.

Each December, the Performing Arts Department of Concord High School in Elkhart, Ind., has planned, produced, and staged several performances of its "Christmas Spectacular." Each year the show closes with a 20-minute depiction by students of the story of the birth of Jesus Christ.

However, in December 2015, a federal judge issued an injunction against the live nativity, ruling that the version performed for nearly 50 years was an unconstitutional religious endorsement.

The school then modified the nativity enactment for the 2015 performance, using mannequins in place of live student performers. FFRF and the ACLU note that this modified nativity scene is no more legal or appropriate than the original.

The plaintiffs — a student who participates in the Performing Arts Department, three parents who have attended and will attend the event in order to support their performing children, and FFRF — are entitled to a permanent injunction barring all versions of the nativity enactment.

No windfall for FFRF in lawsuit settlement

FFRF is going to see a little reimbursement as part of its legal victory over the Chino Valley School Board in California.

U.S. District Court Judge Jesus Bernal ruled on Feb. 18 that the School Board's prayers violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Of the \$200,000-plus that Bernal fined the Chino Valley Unified School District Board of Education for violating the U.S. Constitution, FFRF will be receiving a bit more than \$40,000 as reimbursement for all the hard work that Staff Attorneys Andrew Seidel and Rebecca Markert put in. The rest will go to attorney David Kaloyanides, who litigated the case in California for the organization, and his law clerk Roda Torres.

If the School Board pays up, which could depend on the appeal, FFRF will simply be recouping the cost of having Seidel and Markert work the case, not reaping a windfall. The Chino Valley School Board has taken the legally and constitutionally unwise step of appealing the decision, so it'll likely be a while before FFRF sees any of the reimbursement.

However, the fees are an important deterrent against other governmental bodies behaving similarly.

"Sadly, these fees are important," Seidel explains. "Not because they generate income for FFRF, but because they deter other school districts from violating the law and strengthen FFRF's ability to resolve future cases without litigation, which is always our goal."

Michigan city's behavior questioned, decried



Doug Marshall, a resident of Warren, Mich., secured the right last year to set up a Reason Station in the city hall after a hard-fought court battle in which FFRF, the ACLU and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State assisted him. On May 5, the city observed the National Day of Prayer on the building's lawn. Mar-

shall, who had a permit reserving space in the indoor atrium, was booted out with less than 24 hours notice and without explanation. Upon questioning by FFRF, the city claimed that "the atrium will be set up as an alternate site in the case of rain or poor weather."

FFRF asserts that this behavior on the part of the city is unjustified and that it is punishing Marshall for his views. Added evidence for FFRF's contention is that the weather forecast for the day predicted no chance of rain. The city lacks any written criteria for revoking approval of a permitted event, which allows the Reason Station to be restricted at the whim of city officials.

FFRF challenges church school trip

FFRF strongly objected to an Arkansas school district's church trip to celebrate the National Day of Prayer.

The Jessville Public School District organized an excursion of students from the local high school to the Village Church of Christ. The outing was during the school day.

FFRF points out that such blatantly religious activities would not be permitted to take place inside public schools during the school day. A school district-organized visit to a church is no more permissible.

Non-Christian and nonreligious students are made to feel like outsiders when a school district coordinates a trip for prayer to a church, FFRF asserts. And the fact that participation and attendance is optional is no pretext, as courts have repeatedly ruled.

FFRF: Investigate adult-run student club

FFRF is questioning adult involvement in an Indiana public school religious club.

The Foundation of Christian Students chapter at Riverside Intermediate School in Fishers, Ind., has extensive adult participation, FFRF has been informed. The meetings are led by adults, including four teachers. The sessions include adult-created religious lessons and prayer.

"Public schools may not advance or promote religion," FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne writes to Allen Bourff, superintendent of Hamilton Southeastern Public Schools. "Even when student religious clubs are permissible, it is inappropriate and unconstitutional for district staff to lead or organize a student religious club. Teachers may be present to make sure that students are not violating school rules, but may not participate."

FFRF is asking that the matter be investigated. If the Foundation of Christian Students chapter on campus hasn't in fact been student-initiated, it would be in violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and should be dissolved. The students may reconstitute the club without adult direction.

Chicago-area principal should lose his job

FFRF wants a Chicago-area public school principal to be dismissed for his active promotion of religion.

Rich South High School Principal Michael McGrone regularly boosts religion, according to media reports and FFRF local members. He has brought

in a woman to pray with the students in the cafeteria, the Chicago Tribune reports. In a Facebook posting, McGrone wrote: "This is how we 'stop the killing': Allow God back in school!! Prayer works." He has also said, "Is (prayer) considered crossing the line? I would agree in part, but in so many ways I cannot deny who I am and what got me to become principal."

McGrone's behavior is illegal and unconstitutional, as courts have consistently ruled.

There is no doubt that McGrone is promoting Christianity to the students under his care. (He reportedly makes frequent references to Jesus, in addition to his other utterances and actions.) McGrone's stated goal of getting "God back in school" shows a complete disregard for his constitutional obligations, and he has admitted to promoting religion despite knowing it's illegal to do so.

Proposed school bible class opposed by FFRF

FFRF is opposing a proposed bible class in an Arkansas school district.

Bentonville School Board member Brent Leas has recommended adding an elective academic bible study class to the 2017-18 curriculum. He is justifying it under Arkansas Act 1440, which was passed three years ago.

FFRF contends that such classes violate the notion that public schools should not play favorites when it comes to religion.

And they are legally problematic under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, as well as the Arkansas Constitution.

The Christian bias in such a course proposal is obvious. If the Bentonville School District feels that its students will benefit from a deeper understanding of different belief systems, why has it not proposed classes on the Quran, the Bhagavad Gita or, indeed, Richard Dawkins' "The God Delusion"?

Certainly in theory, a bible course may be permissible as part of a public high school curriculum, but, in practice, such classes are rarely taught in a legal manner, FFRF asserts. Southern Methodist University Professor Mark Chancey did a study in 2013 of bible classes that Texas had introduced six years before and found that many of them "are blatantly and thoroughly sectarian, presenting religious views as fact and implicitly or explicitly encourage students to adopt those views."

Religious ROTC creeds should be changed

FFRF is objecting to the injection of religion into U.S. Army programs.

Specifically, FFRF is taking issue with the JROTC and the ROTC's cadet creeds. The JROTC belief principle ends: "May God grant me the strength to always live by this creed."

Not only does this strike the tone of a Christian prayer, it also adds the requirement that every JROTC cadet believe in a deity and actively seek its assistance.

The ROTC creed suffers from the same problems, since it concludes with: "May God give me the compassion and judgment to lead and the gallantry in battle to win." This, too, mimics a prayer and makes the cadet give an active appeal to God in order to participate.

FFRF skeptical about Texas city's cross sale

FFRF cautiously welcomes a Texas city's decision to deed a piece of public land with a cross to a church, but is skeptical about the terms of the sale and the future of the site.

The Port Neches City Council sold a portion of Riverfront Park containing a 10-foot Latin cross to the First United Methodist Church for only \$100. FFRF had written letters to Mayor Glenn Johnson in November and January objecting to the cross on public property as an unconstitutional government endorsement of religion.

"The City Council's move does show the local government fully realizes that you can't have religious symbols on public land," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "However, the means by which the city divested itself of the cross raises concerns."

FFRF questions whether the city's

motives are secular, given that the community outcry against FFRF's complaint was led by the mayor. He showed up at a rally held by supporters of the cross in November and spoke against FFRF's "attack" on "our cross," vowing, "We may lose . . . but I'm just telling you this: When we come out of the fight, [FFRF] will have two black eyes, a broken leg, and a broken arm. . . . And we may look worse, but they'll know they have been in a fight."

The low sale price could mean that the church was given preferential treatment, and a close watch needs to be kept, FFRF says, on how the church's plot will be differentiated from the adjacent taxpayer-funded park.

FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert tells the Beaumont Enterprise that a "reasonable person" should be able to see where the park ends and

the church property begins and suggests that it be marked with signs as church property and fenced off.

United Methodist Church pastor Wesley Welborn says the church has no intention to make any changes to the land around the cross.

"We're not going to put a fence up, for certain," he tells the Enterprise. "There are no plans right now to put any signs up. Our plans are to leave it as-is."

FFRF even presented Port Neches with a better deal for the land, offering \$2,000 for that 400-square-foot parcel.

"In these times of fiscal austerity and municipal bankruptcies, we are trying to ensure that a city has resources to provide essential public services to its residents," says Gaylor. "\$2000 will make that 20 times more certain than \$100."



This cross sits on a small parcel of riverside land that the city of Port Neches sold to a church for \$100.

FFRF legal victories

Evangelist barred from Florida schools

FFRF has had an ex-con proselytizer barred from a Florida school district.

Hillsborough County Public Schools had allowed a Fellowship of Christian Athletes representative, David Gaskill, who has a criminal record, to interact and proselytize with its students without restriction. Gaskill had been involved with the district's sports programs since at least 2014 and appeared to be the schools' sports chaplain.

FFRF had asked that Gaskill be immediately disallowed from Hillsborough schools. There are serious privacy issues when schools let outside adults pose for "selfies" and pictures with students, including with their arms draped around shirtless students, FFRF contended. The schools also permitted Gaskill to meet with students in "intimate locker room" settings with no other adults present.

No more Christian revivals in school district

A West Virginia school district changed its policies after FFRF objected to a Christian revival meeting held at one of its schools.

Evangelist Matt Hartley sermonized to students at Mingo Central High School in Williamson, W.Va., preaching to them about Jesus, mulling about whether being gay was a choice, and asserting that "God never made a mistake" in choosing a person's gender.

FFRF contacted the school district after receiving a complaint and the district quickly informed FFRF that it was revamping its policies governing such events.

"Steps have already been taken by the superintendent to ensure that such events will not occur in the future and that all staff are educated regarding the legal obligations of school systems when such issues arise," Denise Spatafore, legal counsel for Mingo County Schools, wrote back to FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott.

OK! Students no longer sent to 'Spring Tea'

An Oklahoma school district has assured FFRF that its students will not be attending a moralistic sermon.

The "Spring Tea" is a highly religious annual event in Muskogee. In March, hundreds of middle school girls were preached to on such issues as abstinence, teen pregnancy, sex-

ting and sexually transmitted diseases. Among those attending were students from two public magnet schools in the Muskogee school district.

Last year, FFRF had sent a notice to the district asking them not to have any involvement with the occasion or face legal action. Officials had assured FFRF that the district would abstain, but the organization recently learned that this wasn't the case.

The school district responded that this was all due to a misunderstanding. Drummond explained that the main middle school had explicitly been instructed not to take part, but that the school district had neglected to notify the two public magnet schools. This oversight has now been rectified.

Kentucky town to discontinue nativity display

A Kentucky town will stop displaying an overtly religious nativity scene in response to an FFRF objection.

FFRF had notified the city of Walton a number of times that a Christmas nativity panorama on the City Hall lawn was in violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

After the December letter and a follow-up in April, FFRF has finally gotten an assurance that the town would take heed of the Constitution.

"I have discussed the legal issues raised in your correspondence dated Dec. 23, 2015, with Mayor Mark Carnahan and advised him accordingly," Walton City Attorney Timothy Noyes wrote back to FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne. "Based on that advice, the mayor indicated that future Christmas displays on city property, if any, will give due deference to existing law concerning separation of church and state."

District won't promote religious ceremonies

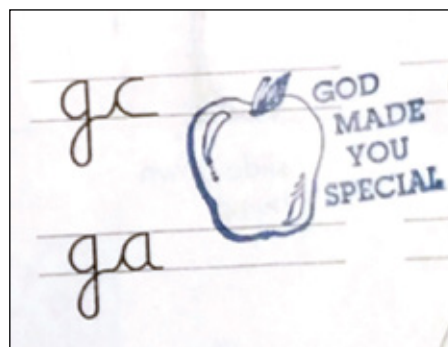
A Texas school district has assured FFRF that it will stop publicizing private religion-infused baccalaureate ceremonies.

FFRF had contacted the Friendswood Independent School District with its concern that a baccalaureate service in Friendswood High School on May 22 has been advertised on the district's website and in a handout sent home with seniors.

The school district admitted that it had made a mistake in publicizing the event and said it has taken swift measures to rectify the blunder.

"In order to remedy any confusion, Friendswood High School Principal Mark Griffon has sent a memorandum to all senior students indicating that the prior notice was sent in error and that the event is not school-sponsored," the school district's attorney replied. "Friendswood High School has also removed all references to the event from its calendar."

Tennessee schools to address violations



A Tennessee school district is taking steps to ensure that state/church violations do not recur after hearing from FFRF about the violations.

A second-grade teacher at Highland Rim Elementary in Fayetteville, Tenn., helped students construct crosses as a class craft project. She also marked student assignments with a stamp that stated, "God Made You Special."

"Public schools have a duty to ensure that 'subsidized teachers do not inculcate religion' or use their positions of authority to promote a particular religious viewpoint, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled," FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote to Bill Heath, director of Lincoln County Schools.

Lincoln County Schools replied with a letter detailing a five-point action plan that the district is implementing.

District cracks down on religious promotion

A Texas school district has made important policy changes in response to FFRF's concerns with the McKinney Independent School District on several issues.

District employees were displaying crosses in a number of rooms at local high schools. A religious poster at a middle school read: "As Believers You Are Saved Forever by Grace through Faith" and continued with other religious description including "Baptized into Christ Jesus" and "Soldiers of Christ."

Additionally, a faculty member at McKinney Boyd High School solicited participation of students to read prayers, recite scripture and sing hymns at an upcoming baccalaureate service. And each year, the graduation ceremony the high school has taken place at in the church sanctuary at the Prestonwood Baptist Church decorated with traditional Baptist Christian symbols.

The School District promised to explore alternatives to the church for McKinney High School's graduation ceremony, and it assured FFRF it would keep the church's religious iconography covered as long as the building was used. The district will no longer organize, sponsor or promote baccalaureate services.

Violations ended in Florida school district

The Indian River County School District in Florida has instituted changes after FFRF contacted the district with reports of several constitutional violations.

The Vero Beach High School football and baseball teams reportedly employed a chaplain, pastor Joe Moore, who was also the director of the Indian River County Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Football players and cheerleaders participated in prayer breakfasts at First Baptist Church alongside their coaches. The breakfasts frequently involved ministers preaching to students.

In an April 19 response to FFRF, the district's lawyer stated that "the superintendent discovered a few employees who did not understand their duties and obligations regarding student prayer at school, and has corrected those misunderstandings. The superintendent has also reminded all principals at all schools regarding public employee duties and obligations involving student prayer at school."

California school board drops prayer

The Silver Valley Unified School District Board of Trustees no longer prays at its meetings, thanks to action taken by FFRF.

On April 25, attorneys for the school district "decided to voluntarily discontinue its prior practice" of including invocations, after hearing from FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler.

FFRF legal victories

Tennessee school's choral program secularized

Students at David Crockett High School in Jonesborough, Tenn., will no longer be compelled to perform "contemporary Christian concerts" as a part of their public school music instruction after hearing from FFRF.

FFRF received a report that music teacher Kelly Sams conducted blatantly Christian concerts, frequently performed in a church. The concerts consisted mainly of contemporary Christian music.

"These songs have devotional messages that would be appropriate in a church setting, but not in a public school," wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert in a letter to the Washington County Schools.

The county attorney replied to FFRF on April 20, reporting that the superintendent and school principal had met with Sams, advising her that "holding a 'contemporary Christian concert' which contained solely religious songs was not consistent with" school policy.

FFRF gets Christian movie removed from school

The Christian movie "Facing the Giants" will no longer be shown in South Dearborn Community Schools, thanks to a complaint lodged by FFRF.

The film follows a struggling high school football coach who inspires his team to believe in the Christian God and to use faith to win football games. South Dearborn Middle School reportedly had students watch it as a reward for finishing a test. When FFRF's complainants contacted the school, they were repeatedly told next time students would be allowed to opt out of watching such movies.

"The district may not require students to opt out of a movie screening, intended as a class reward, in order to avoid a school-sponsored religious message," wrote FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne.

The school principal replied promptly, assuring FFRF that the film will not be shown again, and the school would "make sure that any film shown remains neutral toward religion."

Illinois teacher takes down religious ads



A West Aurora High School teacher has taken down religious ads she posted around her classroom after FFRF sent a letter of complaint.

One poster advertised "See You At The Pole," a Christian prayer event, that included bible quotes. Another poster advertised the school's student prayer club.

On April 25, the district superintendent informed FFRF that the postings had been removed after hearing from FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne.

FFRF resolves another issue in Orange County

FFRF has resolved yet another issue in Florida's Orange County Public Schools. The district, the 11th-largest in the country, is FFRF's most-contacted school district.

This time, the district is ensuring that JROTC ceremonies at East River High School will not include prayer. The 2016 JROTC Awards and Change of Command Ceremony included an invocation listed on the agenda. Attendees were asked to bow their heads, although ROTC students were told in advance that a prayer would be given and if they did not believe in "God or Jesus" that they "just need to stand there and be silent."

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter to the district's two attorneys, pointing out that even in the context of a state military college with older students, a federal court "held that school officials may not compel students to participate in a religious activity."

OCPS General Counsel and frequent FFRF correspondent Diego "Woody" Rodriguez responded on April 26, confirming that the prayer occurred and that there would be none at future programs.

After wavering, school board drops prayer

Thanks to persistent action by FFRF, the Kings Canyon Unified School District Governing Board in Reedley, Calif., will no longer pray at its meetings.

FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler first objected to the practice in November 2015. Superintendent Juan Garza replied on Feb. 24, informing FFRF that the board had passed a new invocation policy. The policy attempted to set up a system like that approved by the Supreme Court for local government bodies in its *Greece v. Galloway* case, and contained inclusive language, but still allowed for prayer at school board meetings.

"School-sanctioned prayer, even in the new, slightly more removed context, is unconstitutional," wrote Ziegler in a second letter on April 7. "Federal courts ruling on the matter have agreed that school boards fall within the school context, not in the realm of other government meetings."

On May 3, Garza informed FFRF that "the district has decided to discontinue its practice of invocation."

Religious email signature removed

An employee at the Eau Claire district attorney's office in Wisconsin has removed an inappropriate religious message from the signature line of her official email address, thanks to FFRF. The signature read, in part, "Joyful, Prayerful, and Thankful - Thessalonians 5:16-17."

"It is inappropriate and unconstitutional for the district attorney's office or its agents to promote a religious message because doing so conveys government preference for religion over nonreligion," FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote in a May 10 letter.

The next day, the office's manager replied that the matter had been resolved.

'Follow Christ' sign taken down at Ohio school



The Genoa Area Local Schools in Genoa, Ohio, have removed a sign reading "Follow Christ" from Genoa High School, after receiving a letter from FFRF.

"It is unconstitutional for Genoa Area Local Schools to encourage its students to 'Follow Christ,' in effect encouraging non-Christian students to convert," said FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne on April 25.

The superintendent replied on May 5 saying the sign had been removed.

Florida district dissociates from religious camp

After FFRF lodged a complaint, the Palm Beach County School District in Florida is no longer partnering with a religious sports day camp, SportsTyme.

The group claims that it creates a sports environment that "leaves God in," including bible lessons. Previously, the district permitted SportsTyme to advertise on school grounds and reportedly helped sign up students for the religious camps.

On May 4, the district notified FFRF that SportsTyme updated its website to delete PBCSD schools from their list of "partners" and added a disclaimer noting that it was not affiliated with or endorsed by the school district.

School to be more careful in music selection

Following an FFRF complaint, the Modesto City Schools in California will exercise more care in choosing music for students to perform.

One section of a Winter Concert held at La Loma Junior High School was overwhelmingly religious. Most of the songs were devotional Christian songs.

In a May 9 response to FFRF, a school official said that the La Loma chorus director had "agreed to be more careful in the songs he chooses for future concerts. He will ensure there is more variety in the music performed at each concert."

Texas school district withdraws from prayer event

After hearing from FFRF, schools in the Gunter Independent School District in Texas won't be participating in future National Day of Prayer ceremonies.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to the district after receiving a report that Gunter High School students participated in a National Day of Prayer event that included prayer and scriptural readings, performing a hymn. The National Day of Prayer is a Christian event originally organized by Billy Graham to "mobiliz[e] the Christian community to intercede for America and its leadership."

In a May 23 response, the superintendent assured FFRF that Gunter ISD would no longer take student groups to perform at the ceremonies.

California Denny's no longer discriminates

The Denny's restaurant in Hawthorne, Calif., no longer privileges churchgoers with a church bulletin discount after FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell contacted the restaurant on Dec. 18 to complain about the civil rights violation.

Cavell informed the restaurant that the discount, 20% off for bringing in a church bulletin, violated federal and state laws providing that places of public accommodation cannot discriminate on the basis of religion.

A restaurant worker phoned Cavell on May 17 to report that the restaurant would no longer offer the discount.

FFRF silences loudspeaker prayer at Texas school

Spearman High School in Spearman, Texas, is no longer including prayer over the loudspeaker at athletic events. The move follows a Dec. 1 letter sent by FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover.

"The Supreme Court has specifically struck down invocations given over the loudspeaker at public school athletic events," said Grover, referring to the 2000 *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe* case.

A lawyer for the school district replied to FFRF on May 19, saying the district "will instruct those individuals providing announcements during football games, and other school sporting events, to refrain from reciting any prayer, Christian or otherwise," and promised corrective action if the instructions were disregarded.



Photo by Michael Fuchs

Don't forget leprechauns!

"While on a trip to Oamaru, New Zealand, I wandered into a used bookstore," wrote member Michael Fuchs. "I loved this sign on the end of the aisle."

Freethought in the Media awardee

Housing exemption is taxing on us all

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor introduced Stuart Watson, a longtime investigative reporter in North Carolina, during FFRF's mini-convention in Raleigh, N.C.:

We got to know Stuart because he called us when he saw our parish exclusion lawsuit that FFRF is filing against the 1954 law that allows ministers to be paid through a housing allowance, which is fully exempt from taxation. It's wonderful investigative reporting, the old-fashioned kind that's hardly done anymore.

He's been an investigative reporter for more than 30 years and has won many national awards, including the George Foster Peabody Award, the DuPont Columbia Silver Baton, the National Headliner Award and many others. He had a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard.

They don't make them like this any more, so we are really privileged to have Stuart Watson here.

Watson's speech, edited for space, was delivered on May 3, 2014.

By Stuart Watson

I grew up a fundamentalist. My father believed that the bible was the holy and inerrant word of God. Every comma. I fell away from that when I went off and met my wife at Vanderbilt University.

I fell away from the church and from fundamentalism when someone told me I was going to hell because when I was baptized I was sprinkled instead of dunked. I thought that any god that's going to send me to everlasting damnation for want of a few gallons of water is no god that I can believe in. That was the end of me and that.

So now, I would describe myself as just a searcher. Just a seeker. Somebody who asks a lot of questions. I'm biased in favor of people who think, and I'm biased in favor of people who ask challenging questions. So I feel very much at home here.

As a reporter, many of our best stories come from tips, and someone sent me a tip that said that a pastor was building a 10,000-square-foot home. It turned out it was a 15,000-square-foot home, 10,000 of which was a heated, four-car garage. When I started looking into it, people said, "Really? Is that all it is? Just a story about a pastor with a big home?" And I said, "No, I don't think it is."

Investigative reporting moves in what they call "the three eyes." You investigate individuals, you investigate institutions, and then you move on to issues or ideas. And so you kind of move up a hierarchy; you move from the specific to the general. And so investigative reporting is about saying, "Is this an isolated incident? Or is it part of pattern? Is it part of something bigger?"

So we aired our report about the huge home that this pastor was building. The name of this church — the largest megachurch in North Carolina — is called Elevation Church. It's a multisite model, which means that the preacher preaches live in one place and it's broadcast around to other places simultaneously, and also over the web and on television. It's technically televangelism, but it's also much



Investigative reporter Stuart Watson spoke to FFRF convention attendees about the parsonage tax exemption.

more than that.

But something that I never really asked came up on Glenn Beck's website. Beck asked if it's OK for pastors to live in extravagant homes. It was not asked to cause class jealousy or create issues of envy or class warfare or anything. It wasn't, "Well, his house is too big." That, curiously, is a question that is asked within the Christian church. Those outside the Christian church were asking a different question.

The Christian church said, "You're asking questions about whether this guy is following Jesus's footsteps? Or is he biblical? Or is he theological?"

But outside people were saying, "No, the only stake we have in what this church does is that you get a tax break. You get a big tax break." So this is a guy who became quite wealthy, using a tax-exempt institution. And then we narrowed it down to talk specifically about the housing allowance. You might call it the parsonage allowance.

Why the tax break?

The issue is that Dan and Annie Laurie, as heads of a small nonprofit, are not eligible to take this tax exemption. Whereas, if you are a rabbi, if you are a minister, if you are a priest or if you are an imam, you are eligible.

So there is a distinction made. Their argument is that it is a violation of the Establishment Clause, which is the first part of the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." The courts and the lawyers have to determine whether this tax-exemption for religious leaders is de facto establishing a religion.

The way that this impacts atheists and agnostics is that it gives these pastors nonprofit status. So the church itself does not pay property taxes, the church gets tax exemptions. But more importantly for the purposes of the federal lawsuit, the bigger the house, the bigger the tax break for the pastor.

Let's watch this video so we can see what I'm talking about.

[A video is shown to convention attendees. An edited version of the video has been

transcribed here.]

Stuart voiceover: When we first reported how Elevation Pastor Steven Furtick was building a 16,000-square-foot home, we got a lot of complaints from his supporters. "So what if he builds a huge house? How is that any concern of yours or anyone else's?"

Well, the answer is, if you are a taxpayer, it is your concern because pastors don't pay income taxes on the salary for housing. It's called a parsonage allowance. And when preachers are exempt from paying a big chunk of income taxes, guess who does pay?

Pastor Steven Furtick will not reveal how much Elevation Church pays him as a tax-free parsonage allowance. But his mentor, Ed Young Jr. in Dallas, gets about a quarter million dollars a year, tax-free, just for housing.

But my question about the parsonage allowance doesn't start or end with Pastor Steven and his big house. Seventeen years ago as a young reporter, I wanted to know why the CEO of Goodwill Industries of Eastern North Carolina, a man named Dennis McClain, got \$54,000 a year just for expenses.

McClain, a Methodist minister assigned to Goodwill, gets a parsonage allowance even though he doesn't pastor a church. The Raleigh News and Observer reports McClain and his wife, also at Goodwill, earn nearly \$800,000 a year. Thanks in a large part to the parsonage allowance, more than \$147,000 of that is tax-free.

Dan Barker voiceover: We think that's unfair. I was an ordained minister. After 19 years of believing, really believing and preaching the gospel, I changed my mind.

Stuart voiceover: When Dan was a preacher, he got a tax break for housing.

Dan voiceover: You don't even have to report it! It was nice. I mean, who wouldn't want that advantage? If you're paying your taxes, you want ev-

ery break you can get.

Stuart voiceover: But as atheists, Barker and his wife and co-president, Annie Laurie Gaylor, sued the IRS over the parsonage exemption. The atheists sued in federal court in Madison, Wis., where the headquarters is. They claim the parsonage allowance violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution because Congress gave a tax break to clergy, but not to all nonprofits. The bigger the house, the bigger the tax break, because the parsonage allowance is limited only by the fair market rental value of the pastor's home.

Annie Laurie voiceover: So if you choose to live in the Sistine Chapel or a mansion, you can't claim more than the fair rental value, but that could still be astronomical.

Stuart voiceover: Dan and Annie Laurie couldn't care less what Elevation Church pays Steven Furtick, but they do care about the tax breaks.

Dan voiceover: If they want to pay the pastor \$50 million a year, we are not complaining about that, that's freedom. But if they are excluding housing from taxation, tax liability, then that's hurting all of us.

Stuart voiceover: And thanks to the secrecy Congress affords churches, taxpayers have no idea how much the parsonage allowance is even worth.

Annie Laurie voiceover: It's shielded from public scrutiny, yet the public is subsidizing churches.

Stuart voiceover: You see, most nonprofits have to make their tax forms public. Only last week a federal judge in Wisconsin handed the atheists a first-round victory. The judge ruled the tax break for the parsonage allowance is unconstitutional and should be thrown out. The decision will almost certainly be appealed.

[End of video]

Questions raised

We went to the church early on and said we'd like to interview Pastor Steven. Not just about his house, but about the whole movement. The movement has really been phenomenal and in eight years has gone from seven families to about 15,000 people a week. So

it mushroomed. It became really kind of extraordinarily successful.

So, just like any other nonprofit institution, there are questions raised.

My argument to them was that we are not picking on you, but you have become big. And so we are asking the same types of

questions we would ask a health care nonprofit or a United Way nonprofit — any kind of charitable nonprofit enterprise. We're asking you where the money goes. Some of my colleagues in journalism said this a story about faith. I said this is a story about money, a story about real estate, a story about tax law. But if you go to people and say, "Hey, let me educate you on the tax exemption of the parsonage allowance," well, there aren't enough open bars in the world to keep people fixated on that!

But if you say this is about Pastor Steven and his 15,000-square-foot home,

Continued on page 13

Ingersoll statue restoration under way

A 105-year-old statue of one of America's most illustrious nonbelievers is set for a long-overdue restoration.

FFRF raised funds from donors across the nation to repair the historic statue of Robert G. Ingersoll in Glen Oak Park, Peoria, Ill. The restoration will cost Peoria taxpayers nothing, thanks to 248 donors from around the nation, representing many states and Puerto Rico, who contributed more than \$35,000.

Ingersoll (1833-1899), a Civil War officer, prominent lawyer and attorney general of Illinois, was also a famed freethinking orator who settled for much of his life in Peoria. His speaking fees ranged as high as \$7,000 more than a century ago. He once attracted 50,000 people to a lecture in Chicago, which was 40,000 too many for the Exposition Center.

FFRF member Zenos Frudakis, an internationally acclaimed sculptor, has arranged to help the Laran Bronze Foundry in Philadelphia carry out the restoration.

Created in 1909 by Fritz Triebel in Genoa, Italy, the statue has a hole in the base and in the shoe, a seam in the right leg, poor patching, severely



Photo by Walter Meeks

The statue of Robert G. Ingersoll is moved into a van so it can be transported to the Laran Bronze Foundry in Philadelphia.

corroded iron armature, surface and interior corrosion of the bronze, and cracks in the granite base.

Ingersoll's speeches and writings fill 12 volumes, known as "The Dresden Edition," that are highly prized today. Among his pithy remarks:

- "All religions are inconsistent with mental freedom."
- "The hands that help are better far than lips that pray."

The base is expected to carry one of Ingersoll's more popular sayings: "Happiness is the only good. The time

to be happy is now. The place to be happy is here. The way to be happy is to make others so."

This marks the first time FFRF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, has partnered with a city government on a public works project.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor said local member Ken Hofbauer, who is part of the Peoria Secular Humanist Society, raised the alarm on the condition of the statue and worked with the Peoria city parks division to approve the project. She also thanked

Jeff Ingersoll, a descendant of Ingersoll with the Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee, for working with FFRF on the project. The new base of the statue will carry the names of donors who contributed at least \$1,000.

"We're so pleased freethought will still play in Peoria," Gaylor added.



Photo by Walter Meeks

The statue of Robert G. Ingersoll is lifted and moved off its base recently in Peoria, Ill. The statue is set for a long-overdue restoration.

Housing exemption

Continued from page 12

then all of a sudden people are paying attention. They wonder about that guy, they've seen him on television, they wonder what's his deal.

Well, we tried to pursue what his deal was. Along the way, they said they would not give us a financial statement. They later released it after all of our reports. Because of the money that flows around it, the financial statement doesn't give the complete picture, but at least they released an audited financial statement.

They made both volunteers and certainly church employees sign a confidentiality agreement. He would not submit to an interview. I met with him face to face and asked for an interview, offered to do unedited interviews and put them on television, offered to put them on the web, offered to let him shoot the interviews himself. I offered to let him ask me any questions on camera that he wanted to. I submitted registered letters requesting interviews. I asked in every way I knew how to ask. Every way short of carrier pigeon. The answer was always no.

Cloak of secrecy

At first, I took that personally and thought that he doesn't like me. But then I discovered that it was pretty much the same way with everyone. This was a calculated strategy, not to sit in front of anybody who could ask a critical or challenging question. This room, I suspect, is filled with people who ask critical and challenging questions.

This cloak of secrecy extended to things that I thought were even benign or beneficial to them. I asked them for their bylaws. How is the church governed? What is his salary? Could anyone fire him? Is there anyone who has the power, or is this a theocracy in which he is God's chosen, God's anointed?

People are not writing checks to Pastor Steven, they are writing tax-deductible checks to the church. In exchange



Stuart Watson accepts FFRF's Freethought in the Media Award at the 2014 mini-convention in Raleigh, N.C.

for giving \$100 or \$100 million, do they get accountability? Do they get any say in how he runs it? No, they do not, because the way the board is selected is not democratic. The board of directors is made up of other mega-church pastors. He pays them to come preach at his church, they pay him to come preach at their church, and so it's all very nice and cozy. They're the ones who set his salary. I think that is one of the reasons why you don't see the bylaws.

Increasingly, I wonder what is actually giving and what is buying public relations? If you come to the community and you want to get a name for yourself, you start throwing money around. How is that any different from advertising?

Yet, for a certain amount of money, you can guarantee yourself good PR by saying how great you are. So we wanted to scrutinize a lot of this \$11 million they said that they'd given over the course of eight or nine years in the community.

They showed us the top contributions. They showed us the glossy annual report with full-color pictures. But they said if you want to know about the complete picture, you need to go and ask the recipients. That's very strange, because how do we know who the re-

ipients are? How do I know where you gave your money? It strikes me that if you are the United Way and I ask you what my money was used for, they will do backflips to tell you every little organization that they give \$5,000, \$10,000 to.

And yet they were only showing us the big ones. The rest of 'em? Guess! Guess where the money is going!

We were criticized. People said we were picking on him, that we just don't like him, we've made this personal. But this is not limited to one church, one faith, one pastor. There are multiple people who are living in these big houses who are eligible for these breaks. But you don't get to see them — unlike Dan and Annie Laurie where you can see it on their IRS Form 990, it's right on the web, it's full transparency — because they are not the same as a ministry and outside nonprofit agencies. In the case of a church or a synagogue, those religious institutions do not have to declare this.

[Another video is shown to convention attendees. An edited version of the video has been transcribed here.]

Stuart voiceover: Preachers, really all clergy, don't have to pay income taxes on whatever they're paid for housing, no matter how much that is. They don't even have to tell you about it. We talked

to a CPA who broke it down for us.

Peter J. Reilly voiceover: Clergy housing allowances can be in the hundreds of the thousands.

Stuart voiceover: Todd Coontz preaches the Gospel of Prosperity on TV. That god wants you to be rich, if you'll just send Todd some money. Todd's church, Rockwealth International, owns a million-dollar condo where he lives. Here's the thing. He doesn't even have to tell you if he gets a tax-free housing allowance.

Reilly voiceover: You don't have transparency with churches. That's probably to me one of the biggest problems with churches compared to other not-for-profits.

Stuart voiceover: Peter J. Reilly is a CPA from Massachusetts who's written on Forbes.com about the parsonage benefit of the clergy, and why special tax treatment needs to go.

Reilly voiceover: Churches are kind of a black hole. There is no limit! The rule is one house for the exemption. It can be a really big house, but only one.

Stuart voiceover: So while Congress sides with the preachers' lobby, Peter O'Reilly has a suggestion: Reform the loophole. Cap the tax break. Limit it the same way that the U.S. military does. But that would take an act of Congress, and Congress has not been inclined to act. There are lots of lobbyists in Washington, but few more powerful than the church.

[End of video]

Just to articulate Peter's position: If you want to make a common-sense test, say, in the military, if you have an admiral and by virtue of his job he has to live on the Cape. Then they cap the amount that he can deduct for the off-base housing. So in the military they have a limit to the amount military personnel can write off on their taxes as part of their housing allowance. And he's just saying that the same kind of common sense should apply to the clergy that applies to them.

Annie Laurie and Dan are filing this lawsuit, and all of you are funding it, on the basis of principle in that the clergy as a class are treated differently than other nonprofits.



Rep. Bobby Scott of Virginia is one of the sponsors of the “Do No Harm” bill and also sponsor of the ABC (Access to Birth Control) bill.
Photo by Ingrid Laas



The Wu-Tang Clan takes the stage as the Reason Rally crowd moves to the front to enjoy the music.
Photo by Matthew Copeland

REASON



Bill Nye “The Science Guy” takes the stage to speak.
Photo by Anthony Harden / Alt Media Pros



Lawrence Krauss (left) kisses James Randi on the head during a party the night before the Reason Rally. Photo by Lindsey Ford



FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert speaks during a panel discussion on the separation of state and church on June 5. Photo by Chris Line



Lawrence Krauss waves to the crowd after finishing his remarks. Krauss will be speaking at FFRF’s convention in Pittsburgh in October. Photo by Lindsey Ford



Julia Sweeney gestures at the podium during her comments to the crowd about the Catholic Church and sexism. Photo by Ingrid Laas



FFRF staff and volunteers pose for a picture before the start of the Reason Rally. Photo by Chris Line



Illusionist and activist Penn Jillette plays guitar while Carolina Pena sings. Pena was a contestant on “Ecuador’s Got Talent,” and was told by the judges that she would never be successful without believing in God. Photo by Lindsey Ford



FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel gives a presentation on protecting the First Amendment to a standing-room only crowd on June 5. Photo by Chris Line



Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii smiles prior to giving her speech at the Reason Rally. Photo by Rebecca Cunningham



Annie Laurie Gaylor (center) shares a laugh with Freethought Society President Margaret Downey (left) and actress Julia Sweeney at a panel. Photo by Chris Line



FFRF board member and hard-working volunteer Todd Peissig shows off FFRF’s “Unabashed Atheist” signs he handed out at the Reason Rally. Photo by Chris Line



Activist Rafida Bonya Ahmed speaks at the rally’s Sunday mini-con. She’ll be speaking at FFRF’s convention in October. Photo by Ingrid Laas

Reason Rally leaves many ‘optimistic for the future’

While the crowd at the June 4 Reason Rally may not have been as big as anticipated, the message still resonated among the thousands who were there.

“I left the rally feeling optimistic for the future when I saw so many people passionately fighting for science, secularism, and reason,” wrote Matthew Facciani on his “According to Matthew” blog on *Patheos.com*.

Lyz Liddell, executive director of the Reason Rally Coalition, opened the event.

“We say to our families, our communities and, ultimately, our government, which meets just at the other end of this National Mall, that we exist, we are good without God,” she declared. “We can bring about social change and we are a growing voter constituency.”

Dozens of people spoke at the rally, including Bill Nye “The Science Guy,” illusionist Penn Jillette, theoretical physicist Lawrence Krauss, Reps. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii and Bobby Scott of Virginia, and, of course, FFRF’s Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor. (See page 17 for their speeches.) The Reason Rally was hosted and funded by several secular and atheist groups, including FFRF.



Fans of Wu-Tang Clan cheer during the band’s performance to close out the Reason Rally. Photo by Lindsey Ford

Observers noted the crowd was smaller than during the first Reason Rally in 2012, when an estimated 20,000 people attended.

NASA scientist Carolyn Porco told the crowd the only way to address issues in the governance of our nation is not to “pray the problems away, but to think the problems away.”

Brenda Germain, a member of the group Military Atheists and Secular Humanists

of Fort Bragg, was at the rally with her husband, an Air Force veteran.

“We’re tired of watching our politicians pandering to the religious and ignoring us as if we don’t even exist,” Germain told CNN Wire.

Liddell said the presence of two U.S. representatives, along with Maryland congressional candidate Jamie Raskin, was significant.

Raskin, a state senator who is culturally Jewish, noted that alliances between “progressive religious reformers of all faiths and secular humanists” have changed America by advancing justice and freedom in movements related to abolition, women’s suffrage, labor and environmentalism.

“We must tell the world of how America broke from theocracy and religious war by protecting both freedom of thought and freedom of worship,” Raskin said. “Both secular government and religious liberty [were protected] simply by the ingenious act of separating the church from the state.”

“A pluralistic, secular government is the only way to ensure that all individuals have the freedom to follow the religious path of their choice,” said Gabbard, who is the first and only American Hindu elected to Congress. When Gabbard ran for Congress in 2012, her opponent argued that she shouldn’t be allowed to serve because her religion doesn’t “align” with the Constitution.

Laura Duncan, 57, of Taylor, Mich., came with her friends from Michigan Atheists.

“It’s just really nice seeing people who think the same way you do after being isolated for 50 years,” Duncan told the Religion News Service.



FFRF Member Doug Marshall stands with FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert during the Reason Rally. Photo by Chris Line



Bill Nye takes a selfie with a couple of Reason Rally attendees at the pre-event party. Photo by Andrew Seidel



FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor enjoy the evening festivities after the Reason Rally. Photo by Ingrid Laas



FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover listens to the presenter during the Reason Rally’s Days of Advocacy on June 2. Photo by Anthony Harden / Alt Media Pros



FFRF Member Todd Stiefel, president and founder of the Stiefel Freethought Foundation, watches from behind the stage as he awaits his turn at the podium. Photo by Andrew Seidel



The Reason Rally crowd stands and applauds during Bill Nye’s speech. Photo by Andrew Seidel



FFRF Staff Attorneys Andrew Seidel and Rebecca Markert walk with others toward the Senate Office Building during the Reason Rally’s Day of Advocacy on June 2. Photo by Josiah Mannion

Speaking of reason . . .

Annie Laurie Gaylor's remarks at the Reason Rally

Mark Twain once said heaven for climate – hell for company. And how's this for good company?

It's awe-inspiring to see so many unabashed atheists – and agnostics – who aren't afraid of burning in hell, or of making our voices heard.

I'm Annie Laurie Gaylor. As a third-generation freethinker, I co-founded the Freedom From Religion Foundation with my mother, Anne Nicol Gaylor. Anne was a true firebrand for feminism and freethought. Anne's experiences in the early 1970s battling for legal abortion opened our eyes to the absolute necessity of keeping religious dogma out of our civil laws – especially laws affecting women.

FFRF has grown from two of us to nearly 24,000 dues-paying members. FFRF is a national state/church watchdog and our message is: Beware of dogma. Once religion gets into our government and our social policies – watch out!

Lawrence Krauss kindly mentioned FFRF's full-page ad in *The New York Times* this week, talking about how Congress discriminates against atheists, and very specifically one atheist – Dan Barker! This ad's also running in this weekend's *USA Today* and look for the ad in tomorrow's [Sunday, June 5] *Washington Post*. FFRF's election year message is: "I'm an atheist and I vote." See if you can spot our message now up in 70 nearby locations right here in downtown D.C. – where legislators can't miss it.

FFRF is fighting to buttress that besieged wall of separation between state and church – because we know it's the only barrier standing between us and theocracy.

FFRF has seven attorneys on staff, who ended 240 major violations last year alone! Last year, we also won five significant state/church lawsuits, such as: removing a Ten Commandments monument from a public school in Pennsylvania; stopping teachers in Georgia from forcing kindergartners to pray and from telling a first-grader her mother was a "bad person" for not believing in God.

FFRF has 14 ongoing lawsuits in court including eight suits filed already this year to stop government promotion of religion. This spring, we won a federal court victory against prayers at public school board meetings. This week, we just won a federal lawsuit stopping a really outrageous violation – removing Christian crosses from Texas police cars. [See front page for story.]

We're not a Christian nation – our Constitution is godless.

Unfortunately, reactionary religious lobbies threaten our constitutional rights. The latest assault is the campaign to legalize discrimination – to allow someone else's religion to trump your civil rights. Tell your congressperson to support the "Do No Harm" bill amending the so-called Religious Freedom Restoration Act that brought us that horrible *Hobby Lobby* ruling, cosponsored by our speaker today, U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott, one of my heroes. Civil rights shouldn't be dependent on your zip code – and fanatics shouldn't be allowed to drive our social agenda or run Congress.

We're here at the Reason Rally to tell Capitol Hill and candidates about secular citizens – the fastest growing segment of the population, to act on our concerns: civil liberties, equality, science education, climate change and its root cause – overpopulation, as Bill Nye laudably points out, reproductive rights, and that all-American principle of separation between state and church.

When you vote this year, you're not voting for president – you're voting for the next Supreme Court justice. We must break the 4-4 court deadlock so reason and compassion can prevail in one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

We invite you to become a part of our essential work to educate the public about nontheism, and to get religion out of government – by joining us at FFRF.org.

And now, Dan Barker wants to tell you a story . . .



FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor speaks about FFRF's successes during the Reason Rally.

Photo by Ingrid Laas



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker tells the crowd of his lawsuit against Congress. Photo by Lindsey Ford



Gaylor and Barker share the podium at the 2016 Reason Rally. Photo by Lindsey Ford



Barker and Gaylor look out over the crowd outside the Lincoln Memorial on June 4.

Photo by Andrew Seidel

Dan Barker's comments at the Reason Rally

That's right. I am suing Congress.

Did you know that almost \$800,000 of your taxes are spent each year for chaplains to open Congress with prayer? That's more than \$2,000 per prayer!

Although a quarter of Americans are nonreligious, all of the prayers have been blatantly religious, almost all Christian.

Shouldn't the House of Representatives be representative?

Many of those prayers are delivered by guest chaplains. Over the years, the Freedom From Religion Foundation has asked Congress to allow me to give a secular invocation.

As many of you know, I was an ordained Christian minister. I preached for 19 years before I saw the light. After examining my faith with reason, I finally threw out all the bathwater and discovered: "There is no baby there!" There is no evidence, no argument and no need for a god. I just lost faith in faith.

But I did not lose my desire to participate in government.

Last year we finally found a member of Congress who agreed. My representative, Mark Pocan, asked House Chaplain Father Pat Conroy, a Jesuit priest, to allow me to open Congress with a secular invocation.

The chaplain turned me down.

An atheist cannot solemnize government, he said, because the prayer needs to address a "higher power." I replied that in this country, there is no power higher than "We, the people."

In this country, there is no religious test for public office. I told him that although I cannot invoke a supernatural spirit, I can invoke the "spirit" of the Founding Fathers Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine, who put "Common Sense" over dogma, and reason over faith.

The chaplain still turned me down.

So the Freedom From Religion Foundation has just filed a lawsuit against Congress for discrimination, denial of equal rights, and violating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

James Madison said there should be no chaplains in government at all, and we agree, but if there are, they should at least be inclusive.

In my book *Life Driven Purpose*, I declare the truly "Good News" that we atheists offer the world: There is no purpose of life. There is purpose in life.

In my newest book, *GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction* – which Richard Dawkins asked me to write – I show that the God of the bible is not a creature we should base our government on, much less worship or admire.

As Dawkins said: "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."

Part 1 of my book is "Dawkins was right," with a chapter documenting each of those 19 nasty adjectives. But Part 2 of the book is called "Dawkins was too kind," showing that God is also a pyromaniacal, angry, merciless, curse-hurling, vaccidical, aborticidal, cannibalistic slave monger.

Any country based on the bible is doomed to divisiveness, cruelty and irrationality.

Our government should not be praying to that god or any god.

It's time for pious politicians to get off their knees and get to work!

Mr. Paul Aints baseball game July 16

A night of unbelievable fun in Minnesota

By Eric Jayne

Performances of “God Bless America” were wedged into Major League Baseball games 15 years ago as an intended patriotic gesture and healing response to the 9/11 attacks. All MLB teams feature these performances as part of the seventh-inning stretch — along with the traditional singing of “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.” The team’s public address announcer introduces the performer and tells fans to remove their hats and stand as they would for the National Anthem. This is an especially irritating experience during “Faith and Family Night.”

In 2012, the Minnesota Atheists organization had an opportunity to hold an “Atheist and Family Night” with the minor league baseball team in St. Paul. Our billboard campaign caught the attention of local media and that led to a conversation between the Minnesota Atheists and the fun-loving St. Paul Saints. With significant help from Freedom From Religion Foundation, Minnesota’s beloved minor league baseball team will again be secularized and rebranded from the St. Paul Saints to the Mr. Paul Aints on July 16 at CHS Field.

The team is literally rebranded because the player jerseys will feature a modified “Aints” team logo, omitting the usual “S,” but including the scarlet “A” from the Out Campaign, made famous by Richard Dawkins. The misogynistic namesake of the capital city is tossed aside so that “Saint” Paul is transformed to “Mister” Paul. These unsaintly jerseys will be autographed by the players and auctioned off during the game, with proceeds going to Camp Quest, Minnesota Atheists and FFRF. There will also be atheist/secular/skeptic-themed antics between innings and during the game. One example of these antics is “Doubting Thomas,” who goes around the stadium wearing a shepherd’s robe vocally doubting things and questioning calls from umpires during the game.

The “S” will be covered on the Saints signage throughout the stadium and FFRF will have a few banners strategically displayed. There will also be a greeting table by the main gate hosted by local atheists with some free items, including our popular Get Out of Hell Free cards in the style of the Monopoly board game.

The motto of Minnesota Atheists is “Positive Atheism in Action,” so we are demonstrating that by asking fans to give up their “soles” for charity. Our team of volunteers designed large wooden crates for fans



On July 16, the St. Paul Saints minor league baseball team in Minnesota will become the much more secular-sounding Mr. Paul Aints as part of the “Atheist and Family Night.” FFRF and the Minnesota Atheists have sponsored the game for several years.

to donate their gently worn shoes for individuals and families experiencing poverty. All of the shoes we collect will be sent directly to the secular global non-profit Soles4Souls, who will then distribute the shoes to those in need.

It takes a special team to feature an “Atheist Night” game like this, especially since religious belief has such a strong presence in baseball and all other professional sports. You don’t have to be knowledgeable about sports to have heard an athlete give credit to God for the team’s win, or to have noticed a player make a religious gesture after making a big play. To be sure, the players on the Saints are no more or no less religious than players on other professional sports teams, so we are grateful for their participation in this night of “unbelievable” fun. Only a couple of players have refused to play in our past sponsored games, but the vast majority of Saints players

have been really good sports.

The St. Paul Saints ownership includes Mike Veeck and Bill Murray (yes, that Bill Murray). Veeck was recently given the title of “funniest man in baseball” by ESPN, and it’s worth noting that his father, Bill Veeck, was responsible for a number of entertaining stunts, such as in 1951 when he signed the shortest man to play in a MLB game. Standing at 3 feet, 7 inches tall, Eddie Gaedel had an impossible strike zone and was consequently walked on four straight pitches for what would become his only plate appearance. Mike continued his dad’s intrigue for fun and entertainment, and was responsible for the infamous “Disco Demolition Night” at a Chicago White Sox game in 1979.

Bill Murray isn’t as visible as Veeck at St. Paul Saints games, but he occasionally makes an appearance. He even greeted fans at the main gate during the last game of the 2014 season, which was the last game played at the original stadium. They now play in a brand new stadium (CHS Field) that was awarded “Best New Ballpark” last year by Ballpark Digest. Besides being part owner of the Saints, Murray also holds the title of team psychologist and once filled in as third-base coach during a game where the Saints rallied from a seven-run deficit in the third inning to win the biggest comeback in team history.

The Saints have one of the most competitive teams in the American Association league and are expected to make the playoffs again this year. They are quite popular in the Twin Cities market and they sell out most of their games. Our “Atheist Night” game will likely be sold out too, just like last year. We have some sections reserved for the Minnesota Atheists-FFRF group, but they are selling quickly. The Infield (aka “Infidel”) section has already sold out but there are some seats still available in the General Admission section. Tickets can be purchased at Saintsgroups.com (password is 2016atheists).

The first pitch against the Fargo-Moorhead Redhaws is scheduled for 7 p.m., but we’ll be grilling and tailgating in the southeast parking lot by about 3 p.m. Food and drinks (alcoholic and non-alcoholic) will be plentiful. We are also planning to hold a pregame speaking event with familiar FFRF leaders at a local library nearby, which is next to a light rail station that will take you directly to the ballpark. Details, including exact time and location for these pregame festivities, will be updated at MinnesotaAtheists.org/baseballgame.

Eric Jayne is an FFRF member and president of Minnesota Atheists.

They said what?

We held each other accountable and we studied God’s word. He is a good man that loves the Lord. He gets his integrity and values from Him. He doesn’t deserve what he is going through.



Tom DeLay

Former House Majority Whip Tom DeLay, defending Dennis Hastert’s character after the former speaker pleaded guilty to illegally giving \$900,000 to an individual Hastert allegedly sexually abused when the victim was a child
USA Today, 4-23-16

I was obeying my law. I had couples bring in the whole Supreme Court ruling and I said, “You know, I really don’t need to see this because that’s not a law, that’s a ruling.”

Kim Davis, Kentucky county clerk, on her rationale for denying marriage licenses to same-sex couples
RightWingWatch.org, 5-20-16

In schools all across the nation, children are being encouraged to try the homosexual lifestyle and even to play-

act like the opposite sex because they could be a transgender. And homosexuals are even wanting churches to be punished for just sharing what the bible says, if it contradicts what they want.

Oklahoma state Rep. Sally Kern, who continues to espouse her longstanding belief that “the homosexual agenda is worse than terrorism.”

RightWingWatch.org, 5-13-16

Something came over me, I think the Lord came to me, and He just said, ‘Get in the truck and leave.’ And when I got in my truck, you know, I was so proud.

Conservative Christian Ken Shupe, owner of Shupee Max Towing in South Carolina, who refused towing service to a woman who had a Bernie Sanders bumper sticker on her vehicle, implying he had a religious right to refuse service to Sanders supporters

Raw Story, 5-5-16

In my history of serving the public since 2006 as an elected official, in both capacities as state legislator and Bradley County sheriff, I have posted

numerous items about religious activities. I have never been condemned or challenged because of it.

Eric Watson, Bradley County, Tenn., sheriff, who is being sued by American Atheists because his office won’t stop preaching Christianity on the department’s official Facebook page
Cleveland Daily Banner, 5-14-16

Ms. [Mary Lou] Bruner has said that she wants creationism taught in science class. And that her views represent those of the district. Are you Christian enough to represent this district?

“Inside Texas Politics” host Bud Kennedy, to Keven Ellis, who ended up defeating Bruner for a seat on the Texas State Board of Education

CrooksandLiars.com, 5-22-16

When we only teach theory — it’s a theory, theories are unproven — but in the science class, if only one theory is taught, then we’re teaching a religion. It is the religion of atheism.

Mary Lou Bruner, former candidate for the Texas State Board of Education, in a debate with Keven Ellis

CrooksandLiars.com, 5-22-16



Church of the Confused Chicken

This photo of the Church By The Sea in Tampa, Fla., has been making the rounds on social media for looking like a character from the video game *Angry Birds*. Perhaps the architect was channeling Frank Lloyd Wright, who said, “Regard it as just as desirable to build a chicken house as to build a cathedral.”

Reduced copy of ad which ran recently in The New York Times, USA Today and Washington Post. See Page 2

ADVERTISEMENT

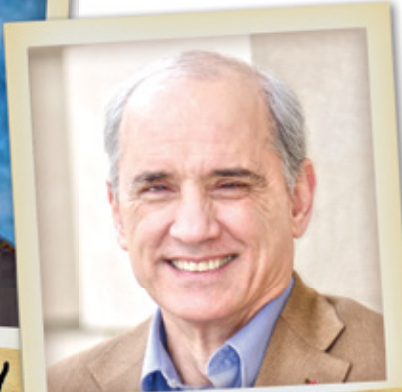
Atheists DON'T HAVE A PRAYER IN CONGRESS

THAT'S WHY THE FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION & ITS CO-PRESIDENT, DAN BARKER, ARE SUING CONGRESS.



Chaplain Conroy

Photo: Ingrid Laas



Dan Barker

The House Chaplain has explicitly barred Barker, an atheist, from delivering a secular invocation to open Congress.

Did you know that each year \$800,000 of taxpayer dollars go to pay two chaplains just to open Congress with a prayer? Did you know 96 percent of these prayers are by Christians?

Did you know that a nonreligious person has never been allowed to give a guest invocation before Congress? Yet a quarter of the U.S. adult population today is nonreligious.

SHOULDN'T THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BE REPRESENTATIVE?

FFRF's lawsuit charges that Chaplain Patrick Conroy, a Roman Catholic priest, is using his perch to discriminate against Barker and other nonreligious constituents, even as he lines his pocket with their tax dollars.

It's time for Congress to welcome atheists, agnostics, skeptics, secular humanists and other freethinkers to "the People's House."

And it's time for nonreligious voters to make our voice heard by voting for candidates who will finally get religion out of government.

Call **1.800.335.4021** for information and a free copy of Freethought Today, FFRF's newspaper. Or help us by joining the Freedom From Religion Foundation today!



FFRF.ORG/DONATE

FFRF, a national association of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), works as a watchdog to preserve the constitutional principle of separation between religion and government. FFRF became a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit in 1978. FFRF has 23,800 members, and litigates (with a team of seven attorneys), broadcasts and educates.

FFRF · Wash Post Ad · POBox 750 · Madison, WI 53701 · 800.335.4021 · FFRF.org

- I would like to become a member. (Includes 10 issues of *Freethought Today* newspaper.)
- I would like to donate to FFRF's Legal Fund. \$ _____

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Make payable to "FFRF." Dues and donations are deductible for income-tax purposes.

Membership Dues

- Individual..... \$40
- Household..... \$50
- Gung Ho..... \$100
- Sustaining..... \$250
- Sponsoring..... \$500
- Life Member...\$1,000
- "After Life"...\$5,000
- Student..... \$25

FFRF protects membership confidentiality and does not divulge, rent, sell or give away its mailing list.

Strong Backbone Student Activist Award

Removing prayer from graduation

FFRF awarded Sarah \$1,000 from a fund endowed by an octogenarian member who wishes to remain anonymous.

By Sarah Barrios

Nicholls State University has a long-standing history of subjecting its graduating seniors to either a Catholic or Southern Protestant commencement prayer at the graduation ceremony.

I understand that we live in a highly Christian area, as on our campus alone there are two churches, with many more just down the road. Christians are certainly the majority. However, rights should not just belong to those in the majority.

So, after a meeting with the Secular Student Alliance on campus, I decided to write a letter to our university president asking him to either “remove Christian prayer from commencement exercises at Nicholls State University altogether, or open the exercises to a broader range of religious denominations.” My suggestion was that a moment of silence would be best, as it would give everyone time to reflect and be thankful.

The letter also pointed out that commencement at many universities is an entirely secular celebration and that we did not feel that ours was enhanced by adding a religious component. I expressed that exposing students to a religious exercise that only included members of Christian belief would be unfair and disrespectful. The letter closed by stating the following: “We feel that such an action, regardless of its intent, is disrespectful to any students and faculty. Clearly, commencement should be a time when all students can celebrate their shared academic accomplishments with full respect of all beliefs and life stances. It seems clear to us that all in attendance can be fully respected only when all feel that they are fully



Sarah Barrios is the president and co-founder of the Secular Student Alliance at Nicholls State University.

ly a part of the celebration.”

Due to the demographic majority of Christians in this area, I fully expected my letter to be brushed off and ignored.

Surprisingly, I received a letter only a few weeks later from the president’s office informing me that they were putting a plan in place to remove the Christian benedictions from the graduation ceremony. The letter stated: “The inclusion of a religious toned invocation and benediction was never intended to exclude members of our community but to bring a matter of solemnity to the occasion. However, your point has been considered and we will take steps to incorporate a moment of silent reflection instead of an invocation in the commencement program.”

I was not expecting success so quickly, but I commend Nicholls State for listening to its students and considering their views and beliefs.

However, I was worried that this change may not be permanent. I have heard that some faculty members

are very upset about prayer being removed from the graduation ceremony, and that efforts are under way in an attempt to overturn our president’s decision.

After hearing this, I jumped on our group’s Facebook page right away, urging people to think about their fellow student by saying the following: “Let us keep in mind why we made this request in the first place. Nicholls is a place that many students call home. These students come from a variety of backgrounds: Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, pagan and nonreligious. For only one of those to have representation at graduation (an event whose purpose is to celebrate the academic achievements of every graduate, no matter where they’ve come from or where they’ve been) is extremely disrespectful to our fellow students who may believe something different, or not believe in anything at all.

“Students at Nicholls all pay the same tuition. We all endure many of the same struggles. We all deserve the same representation. Let us not be divided by this, but instead stand together as one student body, believing in and hoping for a better tomorrow. Together.”

Since then, I have not heard about any success from those trying to overturn the university president’s decision. If it comes to a vote, I truly hope that our student body would choose to vote for what would unite us rather than what would divide us. However, I am fully prepared to fight for the less represented on campus. We are all entitled to live in a world free from persecution. I believe this should especially be true for an academic institution. That’s why I fight. That’s why I’m a student activist.

Sarah Barrios is a senior at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, La, where she is completing her degree in biology. She runs the Nicholls chapter of the Secular Student Alliance as its co-founder and president. Other interests of hers include “music, art, politics, and daydreaming about saving our rapidly disappearing coastline.”

Tiny Home village gets \$12K donation from Nonbelief Relief

By PJ Slinger

A former dilapidated mechanic shop and used-car store lot in Madison, Wis., has been transformed into a successful small village where former homeless people are now living in what are called Tiny Homes.

These homes, each less than 100 square feet, are built, maintained and paid for by volunteers and donors to Occupy Madison, Inc., a nonprofit organization.

Nonbelief Relief, under the um-

brella of FFRF, has donated \$12,000 to Occupy Madison Village for what, in essence, amounts to two additional Tiny Homes. Nonbelief Relief was incorporated in 2015, with FFRF as its sole member.

Each Tiny Home includes a kitchenette, small table, closet and storage loft, water storage system, heat, insulation and a bed.

The land, at 304 N. Third St., was purchased in May 2014 by Occupy Madison.

“We wanted to become a member of the neighborhood, not just come in and stake a claim to a piece of property,” said Luca Clemente, Occupy Madison’s vice president.

As with Habitat for Humanity, sweat equity is used to determine a person’s ability to move into one of the homes. A person earns the right to live in one of the Tiny Homes after putting in 500 hours of work.

Since the residents who live in the homes are not actually the owners, they are referred to as stewards. Gene Cox is one of OM Village’s success stories. Has been a steward since February 2015, but got involved in OM Village well before that.

“I just started coming out here to help,” he said. “I was just living in a van, so I wanted to get out and do something.”

Perhaps most importantly, with the stability that living in a home offers, Cox was able to get a job.

Cox said he definitely feels a sense of belonging, something that’s impossible when you live in a vehicle.

“I like my neighbors. It’s starting to



Photo by Jake Swenson

Nonbelief Relief board members and FFRF took a tour of the Tiny Homes village recently after Nonbelief Relief donated to its cause. Pictured are, back row from left, FFRF Director of Operations Lisa Strand, Occupy Madison Board Member Allen Barkoff, FFRF Board Member Jim Zerwick, OM Vice President Luca Clemente, FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, Freethought Today Editor PJ Slinger, FFRF Co-President Dan Barker; front row, OM Treasurer Bruce Wallbaum and Tiny Home steward Gene Cox.

feel like family,” he said.

There is no time limit to how long a steward may stay in a given house.

“The assumption is that eventually they will become independent and will want to move on,” Clemente said. “But we didn’t want to set it up where once people had success, they were then thrown back out on the streets.”

The next phase for the village is to construct a community kitchen and laundry area on the backside of the existing building where the wood shop and bathroom are.

The success of the Occupy Madison Village was surprising to some and has become a model for other cities to

follow.

“There were no solutions to the problem of homelessness,” Clemente said. “There was no place for these people to go. There is a severe lack of services. So we proposed our own solution. Then we were getting national and international attention in the media, and it seemed like everyone was watching. We’re kind of a tourist attraction.”

Nonbelief Relief is a humanitarian agency for atheists, agnostics, freethinkers and their supporters “to improve this world, our only world,” said Nonbelief Relief Administrator Annie Laurie Gaylor.



Photo by Jake Swenson

Gene Cox stands in front of his Tiny Home in Madison, Wis.

Secular invocations



Justin Scott Waterloo, Iowa, City Council May 2, 2016

FFRF Member Justin Scott, also a member of the Cedar Valley Atheists and Eastern Iowa Atheists, delivered the first secular invocation in Waterloo, Iowa, City Council history. He also accepted the mayor's issuance of a "Day of Reason" proclamation for May 5, 2016, for the city. See page 19.

Thank you, mayor and council members, for this opportunity to hopefully provide an inspirational start to your meeting tonight and do so from a minority point of view. My name is Justin Scott. I am a proud atheist here in Waterloo and I stand before you all humbly representing the Cedar Valley Atheists, the Eastern Iowa Atheists and the growing and vibrant secular community across Waterloo and Iowa.

The secular community is made up of atheists, agnostics, humanists, secularists and skeptics predicated on community without the aid of the supernatural. It is also committed to defending and strengthening the separation of church and state while promoting positive non-theism and critical thinking. Regardless of the label they identify with, these are happy, compassionate and productive members of our society and I am proud to be representing them in this chamber tonight.

Tonight, as our elected officials work to make the best decisions for the city of Waterloo and the residents who call it home, instead of closing our eyes and bowing our heads in prayer, let us instead keep focused on the serious issues that our city government faces. And as our elected officials take on these issues in their thankless positions, let us all embrace the indelible words of some of the most influential freethinkers, past and present, starting with one of the leading astronomers of our time, Dr. Carl Sagan.

And I quote: Every one of us is, in the cosmic perspective, precious. End quote.

Regardless of the issues that get deliberated by this body tonight and in the future, regardless of the accomplishments and shortcomings of this chamber, it's with the sentiment of Dr. Sagan's comment that this chamber should conduct its business tonight and going forward. Each of us in here and across this city is precious; no citizen is more important than any other.

Let this chamber keep in mind that with every yay or nay vote, precious lives of Waterloo citizens will be affected, hopefully for better, but some for worse. While coming to their decisions, this chamber should rely solely on reason, observation and experience, or what Robert Ingersoll, "The Great Agnostic" of the mid-1800s, referred to as the "holy trinity of science."

Let this chamber deliberate with the understanding that not everyone in the room shares the same values, the same life experiences or same religious beliefs. These differences can help to enrich these governmental tasks but only when they aren't used to limit or censor free speech, denigrate or treat certain groups as second-class citizens or promote religious belief over nonbelief or one religious belief over all the others.

Let this chamber keep in mind that, in every circumstance, the minority viewpoint is just as valuable as the majority one. The rights and dignity of all Waterloo citizens should be respected regardless of their race, gender identity, sexuality, religious belief

or lack thereof, for the future and well-being of our great city is enriched only when its diversity is embraced and equality for all is held as a guiding principle. With this said, I appeal to this chamber to follow one of the many tenets of humanism that reads, "We are concerned with securing justice and fairness in society and with eliminating discrimination and intolerance."

Let this chamber never forget that even though their beliefs often inspire their decisions, many decisions have real-world implications so they should never be made in haste. Every decision made in this chamber should be the product of informed reason, inquiry and skepticism. As the 18th-century philosopher David Hume reminds us, "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."

Just as you've welcomed an atheist to take part in this invocation process for the first time, you are encouraged to build on tonight to make your government even more open and accessible to more people, which will help make it as inclusive as possible. Open your arms to other Waterloo citizens living in the shadows of a certain minority group; together we truly will achieve more and the experience will be much more rewarding.

In closing, I'd like to leave you with a thought from Thomas Paine, Founding Father of the United States and English-American political activist: "The world is my country, all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion."

Thank you.



Cheryl Kolbe Clark County Board Vancouver, Wash. April 5, 2016

Cheryl Kolbe is the president of the Portland Area Chapter of FFRF, which she started in 2013. She first learned about FFRF from its billboard campaign in Portland in 2008 and attended her first convention in 2009 in Seattle. In 2012 she was elected an FFRF state representative.

Please be seated during this secular invocation.

Let us think about trust. Trust is the firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability or strength of someone or something.

What do the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution say about trust? Trust isn't mentioned in the Declaration of Independence or in the Bill of Rights. Our Constitution references an office of honor, trust, or profit, a reference to executive branch positions, and trust connotes the idea of a public trust that accrues to the office holder.

Some quotes on trust:

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator: "The trust of the people in the leaders reflects the confidence of the leaders in the people."

Our president, Barack Obama: "If the people cannot trust their government to do the job for which it exists — to protect them and to promote their common welfare — all else is lost."

May we treat each other with respect and courtesy. May we listen, not just to give the person their turn, but to hear and think about the value of their viewpoint.

It is easier to trust people who are most like us. Yet, in government, the challenge is to build trust in your very diverse community. May we recognize that we have many varying viewpoints, and may we recognize which of those viewpoints are relevant to county

business and which are not.

"In God We Trust" reflects the view of many people. Those of us, like me, who do not trust in a god or any gods, are not part of 'we' and have a very different view. I encourage Clark County, as you move forward, to be as inclusive as possible.

When conducting Clark County business, let us all demonstrate to each other that we are trustworthy. With trust in each other, may we build a stronger and better Clark County.

Note: In February 2015 Clark County councilors voted to prominently display 'In God We Trust' in the main hearing room. That display is now on the wall.



Elizabeth Murad Martin County Board Stuart, Fla. May 3, 2016

FFRF Member Elizabeth Murad was a nun for 13 years before leaving the Catholic Church in 1971 and becoming an atheist. She lives in Florida.

On behalf of the Humanists of the Treasure Coast, I would like to thank Martin County commissioners for inviting us to deliver today's invocation.

Let's begin this and every meeting with hope, reason and compassion. Let's put aside our personal differences and work toward the greater goal of building consensus in Martin County. Let's not be swayed by personal biases as to race, gender, politics or any of the things that may divide us.

Let's seek to find areas of agreement and work from there rather than focus on our differences. Let our voices be strong but respectful.

We are a Christian, Jewish, Muslim, humanist and atheist nation of people. We are a secular nation, with plenty of room for all of us in our beliefs and convictions.

So let's avoid the pitfalls that seem to swallow up so many political bodies. Let's envision a county dedicated to the well-being of all of our citizens.

Finally, let's show the world, or at least Florida, that we can disagree without rancor, name-calling or denigration of other views.

Thank you.

NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER

Contest

The U.S. Supreme Court unwisely "blessed" sectarian prayers at local government meetings in its *Town of Greece v. Galloway* decision. If the Supreme Court won't uphold our godless and entirely secular Constitution — adopted at a prayerless constitutional convention — it's up to us.

It's up to you!

We'd like to see secular citizens flood government meetings with secular invocations that illustrate why government prayers are unnecessary, ineffective, embarrassing, exclusionary, divisive or just plain silly.

The "best" secular invocation will be invited to open FFRF's annual convention, receiving an all-expenses-paid trip (this year in Pittsburgh on the weekend of Oct. 7-9), a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

LEARN MORE AT:

ffrf.org/outreach/nothing-fails-like-prayer

Letterbox

Religious subjugation at hands of DOC

I am incarcerated in the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC), and it turns out that incarceration is a never-ending battle to assert my rights as a freethinker.

I am subjected daily to a finely crafted methodology of religious subjugation employed by the NJDOC. It seeks our subservience to advance its ideologies, especially as it applies to religion. It overtly promotes any organized religion that is god-centered.

My complaint is not that the prison offers a surfeit of religious services, it is that it constantly interferes with the normal operations of the prison. Religious programming regularly retards the meal schedule, interrupts with educational opportunities, recreation, secular social programs and law library access.

Prison staff members are frequently openly hostile to atheism. Freethinking and skepticism are viewed as subversive. The NJDOC's false intelligentia, which views itself as a prison aristocracy, employs ritualistic methodology of belief, which renders its subjects docile and subservient. They utilize organized religion in its most disingenuous form — as a tool of control.

It is my duty to challenge the repression of freethought, wherever it occurs.
Michael A. King
New Jersey

It's long past time to tax the churches

Churches pay no taxes. They don't help build highways, bridges or even fix potholes. They don't help pay for police or fire protection, the government or the military. Yet they are given these services for free.

Politicians are too scared to make these changes for fear of not getting re-elected. I am but a single lowly taxpayer, but I am not alone. There are thousands who want this wrong righted.

There is nothing more American than paying one's fair share of taxes.
Rob Brummett
Colorado

Grateful to FFRF for all it does

I'm really enjoying the weekly reports (emailed to FFRF members Friday afternoons). I watch C-SPAN's Washington Journal every morning, and I always reach for the remote when C-SPAN switches to the House of Representatives to avoid enduring the chaplain's prayer, which drives me nuts! So grateful to FFRF for filing suit against this and for FFRF's efforts against all other attempts to shove religion down our throats.

Patty Siebert
Illinois

God not helping politicians get elected

In the past, politicians may have made subtle references to their belief systems, but it's never been so blatant as it has been lately. The trend started with Sen. Rick Santorum and continues up through Sen. Ted Cruz. All of them flashed the God card, but to no avail. I hope future politicians will no longer use the expression, "I have been 'called' to serve the nation." By



now they should know that God makes a very poor campaign manager.

G.M. Chandu
New York

FFRF bumper sticker a welcome gift

While shopping, I parked behind a car that had a bumper sticker that said, "I'm Catholic and I Vote." At that time I felt if I placed a sticker on my car saying "I'm Atheist and I Vote," my car would probably get keyed or have some damage done to it. Then two days later I received a letter from FFRF, with an enclosed gift: a bumper sticker saying "I'm Secular and I Vote." It's like FFRF knew what had happened the other day. I was thrilled, of course!

Geraldine Woulfe
New York

Bible belt goes all the way to West Coast

We were astounded to read in the L.A. Times that FFRF has been forced to sue a Los Angeles County school district for embargoing news of our skeptical scholarship essays while simultaneously advertising a number of sectarian ones. We had no idea that the "bible belt" extended all the way to this Pacific coast county!

As a result of the district's refusal to abide by the injunctions against establishment of religions in both the federal and California constitutions, we again witness the diversion of already inadequate educational resources into legal costs of defending policies that court after court have found to be unconstitutional. Only the students are harmed.

Larry W. Allen and Marilyn E. Morgan
California

Don't let your babies grow up to be Catholics

We must find a way to warn all those who are still in jeopardy of having their lives, and those of their children, devastated or destroyed by clergy crimes.

Since Catholic canon law mandates massive and complete social cruelty and financial ruin against anyone who even questions a priest, each thinking person is automatically targeted. Documentation for this can be found in the 1962 book *Crime and Immoral-*

ity in the Catholic Church, by Emmett McLoughlin.

One might also investigate the reason for priests committing criminal acts. According to the Vatican document, "New Vocations for a New Europe," he must be a male who has a mind like a child in order to take orders from the Vatican, and must be acceptable by the Vatican with any type of what they call "sexual weakness." We must make an all-out effort to educate all citizens who are about to give their money or their children to this heinous cult! Babies are born good. Give your money to your children. Smile quietly and learn.

Ann Slowey
Pennsylvania

Happy to support FFRF's important work

Enclosed is my payment toward a Lifetime Membership.

The work you do at FFRF is important and necessary, yet also challenging and frustrating. I applaud your tenacity and am happy to support your work.

David Glenn
Wisconsin

FFRF has become indispensable

We just wanted to thank you again for all the great work you are doing on behalf of freethought and the First Amendment!

Without your incredible professionalism, dedication and courage, we who truly value freedom of conscience would be far less hopeful for the future of our nation. As far as we are concerned, you have now become as indispensable to America as the EPA and the SEC, and you are actually more effective and above reproach than they are!

Dan and Donna Barski
New York

Which Texas county is most religious?

In his article in May's Freethought Today, Brian Bolton claims that Williamson County, Texas, may be the most religiously conservative political entity in the country. That may well be, but Brazos County, Texas, also deserves consideration for the title. Brian has been here and knows that we have just as many crazies as Williamson County does. Please give us a little recognition.

Bob Presley
Texas

Facing death as an atheist

I have been a longtime member of FFRF, but, alas, not lifetime. I have terminal pancreatic cancer. However, because I am an atheist, I am not the least afraid of death. It is just as the great Raymond Chandler called it: The Big Sleep. And I like taking naps!

I am an atheist for many reasons, starting with the great atheist philosophers and essayists who have come before us, including Bertrand Russell, Robert Ingersoll and Sigmund Freud, and of course, the "New Atheists," Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, A.C. Grayling, Steven Pinker and many others. Gore Vidal's essay "Monotheism and its Discontents" in *The Nation* magazine several years ago greatly influenced me.

But I am also, and most importantly, an atheist because of the wonderful community you have created with your great organization and expressed so beautifully and articulately in Freethought Today. I love the work you do in fighting the encroachment of religion into schools and government. I love the intelligent speeches from your conventions. I also love the essays from students, which make me confident that the future is in good hands. I love perhaps most of all the letters to the editor, which tell of personal journeys people have taken to a life



of reason and rationality.

Now I live the fullest life I can, traveling as much as possible, visiting friends and family and watching baseball and my

favorite movies and TV shows. I am not in pain, my chemo sessions are now benign and I am happy. Death is just part of life that we all must face. Because I am an atheist, I will not go into that "Big Sleep" with any fear that some utterly cruel fiend, whom many irrational people worship, is going to send me to an eternity of torture, which so many other dying people still fear today, much as they have done throughout history. I feel immensely sad for those people who have such fear of "what realms may come," that the last moments of their lives will be filled with abject terror. My last moments will be filled with life, friends, family and love.

Anthony G. Arlen
California

Anthony was born Oct. 13, 1949, and graduated from U.C.-Berkeley and Hastings College of Law. He practiced in the Sacramento area for 34 years until retiring in 2014. He has a wife, two sons and two daughters.

Letterbox

Articles encourage my belief in reason

When my copy of Freethought Today arrives, everything else takes a backseat to my reading it.

I have to applaud two fabulous articles that ran in the May issue:

1. Hemant Mehta's article on Mother Teresa. I met and heard Hemant at an FFRF convention several years ago and was immediately impressed with him. I was amused by the article and completely agree with the hypocrisy of anointing Teresa (and others) a saint. The reasoning described by the Catholic Church is laughable.

2. The article by David Quintero about suffering was delightfully amusing. I have been stating those points since I "jumped the fence" out of religion eight years ago. It is exactly this reasoning that made me make the transition to freethought.

Both articles are excellent and encourage me in my beliefs in reason. Freethought Today is always a breath of fresh air!

Jack Red
North Carolina

Tax exemptions for religious hurt us all

(This letter first appeared on May 4 in the Fargo Forum.)

Once in a while, a local government takes a church to court to challenge its exemption to local property taxes. It does not happen often enough. There should be no exemptions for religious property.

The argument is made that churches do charitable works the public sector would have to do and thus the tax avoidance is a fiscal wash. It is true that some churches do some charity work. Most of church budgets, however, are taken up with maintaining themselves. A rational way of addressing the issue of charity and taxes is to document the amount of charitable work and deduct property taxes by that percentage only.

The link discusses another trend taking place in churches. It is business enterprises housed or sponsored by churches to help with church finances. Coffee shops, book sales, farmers' markets, bingo and whatever else are business enterprises and should be treated as such.

Churches expect and receive the same public services as tax paying businesses. These are police, fire and all the other engineering, planning and administrative services. When churches do not pay their share, everyone else's taxes are higher.

One of the great questions that must be addressed when we give churches a break on taxes is the question of what is a religion. I don't know how a court can deny any group that claims to be a religion can be turned down.

Perhaps fast food franchises will start calling themselves "McChurch" in order to avoid paying property taxes.

Jon Lindgren, former mayor of Fargo, North Dakota

Nonbelief Relief a worthy cause

I'm glad to be able to contribute directly to helping courageous freethinkers in dire peril.

Marion A. Hansen
California

Defending a free secular society is paramount

Visiting your headquarters today had a big effect on me. I still cannot get over standing next to the lifelike statue of Charles Darwin in your library.

I grew up in a small town where I was repeatedly bullied and beaten up for not believing in God. When I expressed my doubts, I was told to read "God's Word" and it would "reveal the truth to [my] heart." But the more I read, the less sense the bible made, and the more horrifying the God of the Old Testament became. I just couldn't believe that everyone else seemed to get comfort from such a cruel God. My parents were Christians. (In fact, my mother was a Sunday School teacher.) No one I knew had anything but contempt for atheists. If not for the writings of Isaac Asimov, I would have been completely alone. Thank goodness my world changed as soon as I left home.

It is truly wonderful — particularly in this time of Islamic and Christian fundamentalist insanity — that FFRF continues to take a stand for Western enlightenment principles of freethought and inquiry and against oppressive religious dogma. It is even more reassuring to learn that you are actually growing.

Most of us live our lives not knowing if we made much of a difference in the world, but the value of defending a free secular society will always be of the utmost importance.

Luca Clemente
Wisconsin

Luca is vice president of Occupy Madison, which organized and built Tiny Homes for the previously homeless. See page 20 for the story. Also listen to his interview, with Bruce Wallbaum, on the May 21 edition of Freethought Radio at <http://ffrf.org/news/radio/shows/>.

We could be a theocracy without FFRF, others

If it were not for FFRF and other organizations that vigorously defend the rights of nonbelievers, our nation might be a theocracy by now. Thank you for continuing the fight to keep intact the wall of separation between state and church.

Enclosed is my check for \$1,000. Please enroll me as a Lifetime Member of FFRF.

David Quintero
California

Great to see lawsuit against Congress

I am extremely pleased to see "FFRF to sue Congress" in the May issue. I suppose this will take a few years, but I would like to give you a send-off check for \$1,000 and ask that you keep me involved.

Of course, you realize the next lawsuit will be to take the words "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance. That will be another campaign.

Also enclosed is \$1,000 to encourage you to keep printing and distributing the wonderful brochure, "Top 10 Public State/Church Violations and How to Stop Them."

I got your back.
Ernie Harburg
New York



Sharing the crank mail

Here's another installment of the sampling of the mail we get at FFRF from some of our critics. All are printed as received.

Question: hi, i was wondering why, if there is no god, the world seems to be on the way to fulfilling the bibles prophesies. (i.e. one world government, the beast, etc.) what i'm mainly concerned about is not getting the mark of the beast. — *Joe Makowski, Ohio*

It's Only The Beginning: Fkd-up-asshole? Obama and his fkd-up asshole? "justice" department forcing the North Carolina governor (and every federally-funded university, college, school, even tax-exempt church, synagogue, mosque, and all other IRS-monitored non-profit businesses across America) to let so-called "transgendered transsexual" males sneak or barge into female restrooms, changing rooms, and open-shower locker rooms to molest, rape, then dismember terrified little girls might only be the beginning. Wait until they demand such perverts invade private residences all across the United States to do the same thing, imposing the tyrannical excuse of "non-discrimination" for "civil" "rights." — *Delbert Frank*

Freedom from atheists: You will be happier in Siberia — *Liv, Nevada*

East Liverpool High School: I recently read in our local paper about the FFRF threatening ELHS to remove the Lord's Prayer from graduation. I was part of the 2013 graduating class from ELHS, and I don't think that it is right for you people to dictate what the students can or cannot sing. I think that you need to butt-out, and leave it up to the students. This has not been an issue before. Mind your own business, no one is being hurt! I understand that it is a public school, and the school cannot force the students to participate. However, as a matter of fact, it is AGAINST The Constitution to prevent students from choosing to sing the song, and I dearly hope that they will choose to sing it any how. — *Michael Trew, Ohio*

You disgust me: I'm watching my local news in Jacksonville and see where you have decided to push back against Duval County Schools for allowing prayer at functions that involve the school system. You should mind your own liberal business in Wisconsin and stay out of my city. The paper you print your threats on should be red, the color of Hell because that's where you're going if you keep this type of nonsense up. This Country was founded on the principles of God, Faith in God and Country. If you don't like it then leave. Canada is just up the road, I suggest you start there. — *Ryan Pahlow, Florida*

Despicable!: You people are nothing but a hate group. Your actions speak loudly on that fact. Why the heck do you go out and actively seek to bother people who don't bother you? You're not intellectuals or even intelligent in the basic sense for that matter. An intellectual is above attacking people, their faith and things that don't hurt anyone. Hatred exactly the same as the KKK or New Black Panthers. — *James Cook*

Genoa High school: I just want you to know that you have awoken the sleeping giant in our community for those of us who believe in the cause of Christ. You KNOW that the constitution was not created to literally separate the government from the church but it was creat-

ed to protect the church from the government AND ANYTHING THAT WOULD SUPPRESS FREEDOM OF RELIGION. And you if you don't know this then you need to read your history books again as to why this Country was founded. You may try and remove everything that speaks to the cause of Christ in this Nation, but you cannot remove it from the hearts of people in this world. He has already won that victory. I do not believe that anyone in your organization finds hope or peace in your "freethinking" philosophy. That kind of peace and hope comes from Jesus Christ alone. — *Shirley Braatz*

Banning religious music: Having "Religious" Music banned from graduation is going against The Lord, who CREATED you for HIS purpose. If you don't like him, keep it to yourself. Religious music does not promote religion, it promotes a relationship with Jesus Christ, therefore Christianity is not a religion it's a founding faith in Jesus Christ, having a close relationship to him has lord and savior of your life. I am so disappointed in cults and antichrists trying to break that belief I believe in down. How dare you. That is blasphemy!!!! My heart breaks for you. Why would you want to bring down the creator of the universe who loves you doing that???? Huh? I'm so highly upset the way this world is turning into. If you would only think about his sacrifice for us, before banning that, you would realize how wrong you are and how right I am. It hurts me to see this kind of behavior! — *Joshua Richardson*

Constitution: I find it funny you claim to take people to court, public, when you are a minority, I will not only donate to lawyers to stop you but the 1st ammendment gaurentees me freedom of religion not from. You must stop stupid stuff, look at how we were founded And the separation of church and state is not in the constitution — *Matt Roberts*

Idiots: You are all idiots taking God out of the school system. That's what's wrong with America! — *Jason Carboni*

Your agenda: I've read a lot of news lately about your group writing to places all over the world demanding the removal of Religious themes. This angers me intensely. Why do you insist on doing Lucifer's work? Do you really think Lucifer can be trusted? Do you really believe if you follow Lucifer's will, you will be rewarded in this life or the next? Millions have been duped by Lucifer and your group is one of them. Sadly, there isn't a Freedom from People with Low IQ's foundation, then people could just worship God freely without being worried about upsetting some atheists feelings. Oxymoron if I ever heard one. An atheist with feelings? yea, it doesn't sound right, does it. — *Jim James*

port neches: dont know how yall think u won in port neches tx. basically the city bitch slapped yall in the face cause now the cross will be a permanent fixture in port neches park. yall need to go where ppl want yall we dont want yall down here — *Paul Marshall, Texas*

Please forward this to your attorney: You do not have a say on private property or in cemeteries. Cemeteries is considered private property by law nationwide. I will tell all local, national and worldwide media to ignore you want for media attention and do not broadcast about your org or your agenda. We can sue you for discriminating against Christians. That would hold in court nationwide. — *Mike Palmer*

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Alvin "Dobie" Weasel, Omaha, NE: Carrying a concealed firearm in a restricted area. Weasel, founding co-pastor with his wife Jamie of Life Church, was cited in the Eppley Airfield security station for possession of a handgun in his bag.

Weasel called it an honest mistake and said he thought his gun was at home in a safe. "[My bag] is about 40 pounds and it's stuffed with everything. I think what happened was the gun fell in between two of the larger books."

Weasel was also found in possession of a different gun in the same bag in 2014 at the airport. "When it occurs twice with the same individual, it warrants prosecution," said Tom Mumgaard, interim city prosecutor. "If you have a concealed weapon permit, you have an additional responsibility that comes with that permit, and that is to at all times know where your weapon is." *Source: KETV, 5-8-16*

Corey M. Brown, 46, Savannah, GA: 12 counts of mail fraud and 85 counts of wire fraud. Brown, senior pastor of Second African Baptist Church and metro police chaplain, is accused of stealing at least \$250,000 from the church for his personal use from 2005-14. *Source: WTOG, 5-5-16*

Lucas Savage, 37, Clinton, ME: Unlawful sexual contact. Savage, director of ministries at Youth Haven Ministries, which is affiliated with Canaan Calvary Church, is charged with molesting a girl younger than 12 at his home in the fall of 2014. *Source: WGME, 5-2-16*

Jeannette Jives-Nealy, 48, Tampa, FL: Theft over \$60,000. Jives-Nealy, "pastor prophetess" at Kingdom Dominion Worldwide Ministries in Memphis, TN, is charged with stealing \$162,165 in federal grant funds meant to feed low-income children in 2014. *Source: The Tennesseean, 5-2-16*

Richard Thomas, 78, Allouez, WI: 4 counts of indecent exposure. Thomas, a retired Catholic priest, allegedly exposed himself 4 times in March to a 16-year-old boy walking to school. The boy told police he saw Thomas standing naked in a window at Grellinger Hall, a living facility for retired priests.

It's alleged Thomas shouted "hey" and used a flashlight to get the boy's attention. The Diocese of Green Bay has removed him from public ministry during the investigation. *Source: WBAY, 4-29-16*

Michael C. Turner Sr., 61, Capitol Heights, MD: Harassment, 2nd-degree assault and 4th-degree sex offense. Turner, senior pastor at the Miracle Center of Faith Missionary Baptist Church, is charged with assaulting a 22-year-old woman who worked for him earlier this year.

"He would lock me into the back room or his office and touch me and get on top of me and say things to me," the woman alleged. "He told me not to be scared and not to say anything because I was a big girl."

Turner was convicted in the early 1990s of assault and battery and served 6 months of jail after 2 rape counts were dismissed. *Source: WRC, 4-28-16*

Alexander "Alec" Edwards, 25, Albany, GA: Performing an immoral or indecent act to, or in the presence of, a child under the age of 16. Edwards, youth minister at Providence Church and a substitute teacher for Lee County Schools before a 2013 arrest on an obscenity charge, allegedly molested an 11-year-old boy whose family he was visiting in April in Marietta. *Source: Albany Herald, 4-28-16*

David L. St. John, 59, Bristol, TN: 3 counts of rape of a child and 6 counts of aggravated sexual battery. St. John, pastor at Bible Truth Baptist Church and city of Bristol utility services manager, is accused of sexual contact in April with 2 victims under age 13.

District Attorney Barry Staubus said he couldn't comment on specifics but confirmed that St. John's pastoral position "was relevant to the investigation." *Source: WJHL, 4-28-16*

Michael Elmaleh, 42, Milan, Italy: Domestic violence. Elmaleh, rabbi at Chabad House Naar Israel, is accused of physical and verbal abuse of his 16-year-old son for refusing to go to synagogue. He has 8 children. A police report said he has been investigated for previous similar incidents and was taken into custody in 2008. *Source: JTA, 4-27-16*

Jason Price, 31, Horicon, WI: Child enticement, causing a child to view or listen to sexual activity, 2 counts of sexual assault of a student by school staff and 3 counts of exposing a child to harmful material. Price, a teacher's aide at Holy Redeemer Christian Academy in Milwaukee (a voucher school receiving public funding), is accused of sending sexually explicit photos and messages to at least 4 juvenile girls.



Source: WITI, 4-26-16

Ahmed Lee, 36, Monroe, NC: Indecent liberties with a child and assault on a child under 12. Lee is pastor of Judah House of Praise International World Ministries, which meets at the Jamison Inn.

Charges stem from an alleged assault at Lee's home on an 11-year-old whose family attended Lee's church. *Source: WJZY, 4-25-16*

Raphael J. Robinson, 39, N. Aurora, IL: Criminal sexual assault and aggravated criminal sexual abuse. Robinson, head pastor at Kingdom Church, knew the teenage alleged victim, prosecutors said.

He was convicted in 2004 for molesting a 16-year-old and is on a state list as a "sexual predator" subject to lifetime registration. The alleged victim's family said they were not aware of that. He was also convicted in 2013 for failure to update his registration. *Source: Beacon-News, 4-24-16*

Fernando Maldonado, 32, Concord, CA: Multiple counts of sexual assault, including unlawful intercourse with a juvenile younger than 14. Maldonado, a minister at Grace Bible Church, is accused of assaults on a girl, now 17, from 2012-15. *Source: Mercury News, 4-22-16*

Stephen G. Charest, 66, Lake Wales, FL: Solicitation to commit lewdness. Charest, pastor at Holy Spirit Catholic Church in Winter Haven, was arrested in a wooded area near the Lake Fannie boat ramp after allegedly asking an undercover deputy to engage in oral sex. *Source: Fox 13, 4-21-16*

Néstor Monzón, 47, Santa Fe Reconquista, Argentina: Crimes against sexual integrity involving a 3-year-old girl and her cousin of the same age at the residence of María Madre de Dios, a Catholic parish where Monzón is pastor. Authorities said the girl had a partial tear of the hymen and was infected with human papillomavirus. *Source: clarin.com, 4-20-16*

Clayton R. Michener, 19, Sheboygan, WI: 1st-degree child sexual assault and sexual assault of a child under 16. According to the criminal complaint, a woman complained to the church that a guitar player in the youth worship band had sexual contact with 2 girls.

A 15-year-old told police Michener drove her to a parking lot after church, pulled down her pants and performed oral sex on her. A 12-year-old alleged she got a text telling her to meet him in the church kitchen, where he started kissing her and touching her butt. She was able to leave by making an excuse she had to find her Chap-Stick. *Source: Sheboygan Press, 4-20-16*

James Mulbah, Monrovia, Liberia: Murder. Mulbah, pastor of Salvation Christ Deliverance Ministries, is charged in the death of a 23-year-old barber whose wife Mulbah was allegedly having a love affair with. A report said Mulbah stabbed the man with scissors during a fight March 23. *Source: Front Page Africa, 4-19-16*

Jermaine A. Evans, 32, Milwaukee: 2 counts of 2nd-degree sexual assault of a child. Evans, dean of students and girls basketball at HOPE Christian High, is accused of sexual abuse of a girl over a period of 16 years. The complaint said the alleged victim told police that Evans, who weighs 380 pounds, began fondling her when she was about 4 and had sex with her when she was 11 or 12. She alleged they had sex more than 30 times in the last 5 years.

Evans allegedly told police he wanted to stop but the girl didn't so that she could continue having use of a cellphone. HOPE Christian is a network of 6 voucher schools that receive public funding. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 4-18-16*

Joshua C. Scheil, 28, Trevor, WI: Attempted child enticement, using a computer to facilitate a child sex crime and causing a child 13 years old or younger to view or listen to sexual activity. Scheil, pastor at Hope Lutheran Church in Twin Lakes, allegedly planned to meet a 13-year-old girl named Maddy for sex while in

Oshkosh for a pastor's conference April 11-13. Maddy was actually an undercover agent.

Scheil is accused of sending sexual messages and an image of his genitals to the agent. *Source: The Northwestern, 4-18-16*

A pastoral elder, 57, Jaravani, Zimbabwe (name withheld to protect the alleged victim): The Reformed Church in Zimbabwe senior elder is charged with raping his 12-year-old niece. He allegedly told the magistrate at his arraignment that he intended no harm and "did not enjoy the act as I expected because my manhood did not penetrate her small private parts. I continued until I ejaculated." *Source: zimeye.net, 4-18-16*

Stefan A. Delimarich, 30, Parkersburg, WV: Solicitation of a minor and use of obscene matter with intent to seduce a minor. Delimarich, youth pastor at First Baptist Church, allegedly confessed to authorities after a search of his premises that he posed online as a 16-year-old named ethanrjones22 to communicate with a minor and send explicit videos. *Source: WTAP, 4-16-16*

Elizabeth Dillett, 31, Franklin, WI: 4 counts of sexual assault of a child by a person who works or volunteers with children and 2 counts each of sexual assault of a child age 16 or older and 2nd-degree sexual assault of a child. Dillett, a kindergarten teacher and athletic director at St. Peter-Immanuel Lutheran School in Milwaukee (a voucher school receiving public funding), is accused of having sex with a teen boy. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 4-16-16*

Casey Haynes, Moore, OK: Unspecified sexual misconduct charges. Haynes, youth pastor at Central Church of Christ, allegedly shared explicit images and videos with at least 4 boys and girls in his youth group. A girl also alleged he "put his hand under her shirt and grabbed her breast" after a church event. *Source: KWTV, 4-15-16*

Cristopher B. Alfaro, 30, Huntsville, AL: 2 counts of transmitting obscene material to a child. Alfaro, director of youth ministry at Covenant Presbyterian Church, is charged with inappropriately contacting a female minor. *Source: al.com, 4-13-16*

Robert A. Jerez, 35, Tolleson, AZ: Sexual abuse and 9 counts of sexual conduct with a minor. Jerez, volunteer youth leader at Grace Walk Community Church, is accused of having sex with a girl from last October to January and giving her drugs and alcohol.

He is married with 2 children. The girl's father turned their text messages over to police. *Source: 12newsnow.com, 4-11-16*

Chambers said he wanted to fulfill a 'granddaddy babysitter fantasy.'

Willie L. Bell Jr., 29, Cedar Hill, TX: Sexual assault. Bell, youth pastor at First United Methodist Church, is charged with assaults on 3 boys on 2 separate occasions outside an apartment complex. One of the boys is 6. Bell was described as wearing "church shoes." *Source: fox4news.com, 4-5-16*

Douglas Whinery, 80, Tustin, CA: 4 counts of lewd acts upon a child under the age of 14 and 2 counts of oral copulation or sexual penetration with a child 10 years old or younger. Whinery, a former missionary with ties to 3 Protestant churches, is charged with incidents from 2011-16.

He allegedly groomed victims by befriending their families and then taking them to school

and church and on overnight stays. *Source: KABC, 4-5-16*

Jody Hilliard, 71, Duncan, OK: 2 counts of lewd or indecent acts with a child under 12. Hilliard, a retired Baptist pastor and minister of education, is charged with molesting a 10-year-old female relative from out of state last summer during her month-long stay with the family.

A police report alleged he touched the girl's genitals and made her touch his. *Source: Duncan Banner, 4-5-16*

Frank P. de Dood, Lysterfield, Australia: Rape and indecent assault. De Dood, a Salesian Catholic priest, allegedly molested at least 5 boys at Salesian schools in 1978-83.

Salesian Provincial Frank Moloney said in 2011 that de Dood had no contact with children and "works as a farmhand with sheep, cattle and general maintenance at our property" but also was occasionally loaned out to parishes as a substitute priest. *Source: Herald Sun, 4-3-16*

Donald Mansell, 37, Salem, OR: 3 counts of sex abuse. Mansell allegedly touched 2 teen girls inappropriately in 2014 while he was business manager and boys basketball coach at Livingstone Adventist Academy, operated by the Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

"We're getting calls from former students and it appears this has happened multiple times," said attorney Ron Sayer. A student recorded Mansell allegedly making sexually explicit comments and gave the recording to the principal. *Source: KOIN, 4-1-16*

Pleaded / Convicted

James T. Flanders, 48, Ft. Walton Beach, FL: Pleaded guilty to manslaughter in the 2011 asphyxiation death of Marie Carlson, 37, when Flanders was pastor of Calvary Emerald Coast Church. She disappeared in 2011 not long after she and Flanders had a daughter, Sweet Rain Grace Flanders, together. Flanders told authorities he buried Carlson in his backyard, where human remains were found.

"He described an incident where he grabbed her and held her in a tight bear hug and they fell to the floor... and he held her until she stopped breathing," said Assistant State Attorney Angela Mason.

Carlson was living with Flanders and his wife Tanya when she disappeared. Her ex-husband reported her missing. *Source: NWF Daily News, 4-28-16*

Vincent G. Ryan, 78, New South Wales: Pleaded guilty to attempted intercourse with a male aged between 10-18, indecent assault on a male and gross indecency with a male under 18. Ryan, a Catholic priest, was accused of molesting a boy in the mid-1980s. He previously served 14 years in prison for preying on 35 boys between 1972-91 and was released in 2010. *Source: Morning Herald, 4-27-16*

Michael Aulsebrook, 60, pleaded guilty in Australia to raping an 11-year-old boy in 1988 after luring him to his principal's office at a Salesian school. Aulsebrook, a former Catholic priest, entered the plea while the jury was deliberating after a 2-day trial.

The prosecution alleged he gave the boy a sedative-laced soft drink while he was playing computer games and that the boy woke up on the floor after being raped. "Get out of my sight, you disgust me," he allegedly then told the boy. *Source: Herald Sun, 4-21-16*

Scott Morey, 43, Shevlin, MN: Guilty by jury of 13 counts of criminal sexual conduct in 2009-14 while he was pastor at 3 Lutheran churches. He was accused of illicit conduct with 3 juvenile males as young as 9. *Source: Bemidji Pioneer, 4-21-16*

William P. Standen, 67, Sydney: Pleaded guilty to 19 counts of indecent assault while he taught at a Catholic boarding school in New South Wales in 1977-81. Standen retired in 2010 but remains as a member of the Congregation of Christian Brothers. *Source: Morning Herald, 4-15-16*

Howard K. Chambers, 64, La Grange, KY: Pleaded guilty to abetting the sex trafficking of a child under the age of 14 and enticement of a minor into sexual activity. Chambers, minister of music at DeHaven Baptist Church, advertised online he wanted to fulfill a "granddaddy babysitter fantasy" and made a 10-year-old girl perform oral sex on him about 8 times while another man took photos. A plea bargain called for a sentence of between 15 and 30 years. *Source: Courier-Journal, 4-11-16*

Armando B. Morales, 56, Washington, IN: Guilty by jury on 4 counts of felony child molesting that started in 2008 and involved a boy whose family attended a Christian Hispanic church which Morales founded.

"When this 7-year-old faced evil, he told his father," said Deputy Prosecutor Donita Farr in her closing. "The minister convinced the father the boy was possessed, that the boy was a liar." *Source: WBIW, 4-11-16*

'My Only Father': A tribute to Norman Barker

By Dan Barker

He was "my only father," which is how I referred to him in the dedication of my book, *Losing Faith in Faith*. He died on the evening of May 13 at the age of 90. Dad's death occurred on Friday the 13th, which he would have appreciated, since he spent his final decades as a proudly non-superstitious person.

Our mom had died in 2004, but thanks to my brother Darrell and his wife Suzan, a geriatric nurse, Dad was able to live out his life at home in Shelton, Wash., his needs tended by a loving family to the very end.

Dad was a member of the Lenape Tribe (Delaware Indians), which had been Christianized by Baptists and Moravians in the 1830s. His family's memories involved regular church-going. His grandmother Lizzie's favorite song, while raising a large family in Indian Territory before and after Oklahoma statehood, was "Rock of Ages." Jack and Lizzie's son Herbert moved to California in the 1920s with his 18-year-old half-Cherokee wife Marie. Norman Secoyah Barker, the second



Norman Barker as a small child.



Photo by Darrell Barker

Norman Barker shares a laugh with his son Dan. Norman died May 13 at the age of 90.

of their four boys, was born the year of the Scopes Trial. (They knew how to spell "Sequoia," but preferred the Indian way of writing the name of the man who invented the Cherokee alphabet.)

Dad had played the trombone every day of his life since high school. You can see him playing trombone in some old movies from the 1940s, most notably in Irving Berlin's 1948 "Easter Parade," where Judy Garland puts her arm around him while singing "I Want To Go Back To Michigan (Down on the Farm)."

Dad was an original member of Hoagy Carmichael's band "The Teenagers," who played during Hoagy's "Something New" radio show on Mondays in 1945-46. Dad met my mother Patricia (Patsy) in a dance band. That was the night his brother Ray got sick and needed him to sub for him on the trombone. Norman accompanied Patsy while she sang "These Foolish Things," then made the not-so-foolish decision to get married in 1947.

After playing in Big Bands during the 1940s, Dad found religion in a big way. He threw away all his "worldly" records, went to bible school and became a church lay leader. During my teen years our born-again evangelical family used to perform and preach at California churches: I played piano, my brothers played trumpet and trombone, my Mom sang beautifully, and Dad preached and played the trombone.

Norman was an Anaheim City Police officer for 22 years. He says one of the high moments of his career was when he pulled over his mother-in-law for speeding through town. He gave her a warning and a smile.

Like my Dad, I went to bible school and ended up preaching the "good news" of hell for 19 years. When my parents got my 1984 letter of deconversion to atheism, they were surprised, but eventually both became atheists. Mom, a Sunday School teacher, was first to deconvert. She told a reporter that she was much happier as a nonbeliever because "I don't have to hate any more." Dad threw in the towel a couple of years later after some friendly theological back-and-forth correspondence between the two of us. In the late 1980s, a happy nonbeliever, he told a reporter: "You think it's hard being a Christian in today's world? Try being an atheist!"

Dad kept up his musical chops as long as possible. In his late 80s he bought one of those orange plastic trombones that weigh only 3 pounds and sound just as nice.

At the very end, Dad put down his instrument and said he was ready to go. He was suffering from Parkinson's. The days were becoming impossibly difficult. He had stopped eating and drinking. Darrell and Suzan took him to the emergency room where he was diagnosed as terminal and allowed to be taken home under hospice care.

Read more: For more photos from this article, or to read other blog posts from FFRF staff members, go to patheos.com/blogs/freethoughtnow.

After he was admitted to the emergency room, his eyes closed in resignation (or determination), a nurse came in and asked him, "Are you ready to go see the angels and Jesus?"

Dad opened his right eye and stared at her. "No!" he said firmly.

"Dad is an atheist," Suzan informed the nurse, who never said another word.

He died five days later, asleep in his own bed without pain.

Dad didn't believe in life after death. All he wanted was to be buried next to Patsy in Mountain View cemetery in Mesa, Ariz., near where they had lived in retirement for a quarter century.

There will be no funeral or formal memorial service. Sometime in the near future, Darrell and I and some close family members will bury his ashes next to Mom's grave. Norman and Patricia Barker, long-time supporters of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, are honored on the wall of tiles in the vestibule of Freethought Hall, the national offices of FFRF.

Twenty hours after Dad's death, I played in a jazz band in Baraboo, Wis. He would have wanted me to keep giggling. In his memory, as my daughters Glen (Sabrina) and Rebecca were listening, we played "These Foolish Things."

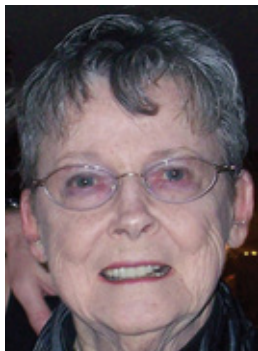
Dad was a constant positive presence. He was very smart and extremely talented. His ego was secure. Relaxed and happy with life, he felt no need to be ambitious or aggressive. He was quick with a joke or a pun, delivered wryly with a repressed grin and sideways glance. He rarely complained about anything, even when we thought he should be more assertive about wrongs he had suffered. He was genuine, humble and unpretentious, with a smiling sparkle in his eye that gave away the fact that he had life all figured out. Family, friends and music — that's all that mattered.

Dan Barker is co-president of FFRF.

In memoriam

Beatrice 'Betty' L. Petz 1929-2016

FFRF member Beatrice "Betty" Lorraine Petz died April 29, 2016. She was born on Oct. 24, 1929, in Firozpur, India, where her father was stationed while in the British Army. She later moved to Scotland, where she lived until 1948 when she met her future husband, Ralph Eric Petz. They married on June 8, 1948, and were married for 50 years before Ralph died in August 1998. Betty lived in Winona, Minn., for 53 years, living in the same home before moving to Sugar Loaf Assisted Living. She was actively involved at the Winona Art Center, where many of her oil paintings were displayed. She also was a talented seamstress, cook, gardener and landscaper. Betty traveled extensively in her lifetime throughout the United States, Asia and Europe, and made frequent



visits to Scotland, Ireland and England to visit family. She was known to family and friends as being spunky, intelligent, independent, with liberal views on religion and politics.

She is survived by daughters Diane Petz and Jackie Petz; and son, Bruce Petz and his wife, Jan Petz. She is survived by grandchildren Jon Scharmer-Weinberg and his husband Edje, Jeffrey Scharmer and his wife Joan, Jessica Pena, and Andrew Petz and his wife Sarah. She also has seven great grandchildren.

Betty's daughter Diane wrote to FFRF and wanted to take over her mother's membership. "My mother was very forthright in telling our family about her beliefs," Diane Petz wrote. "Over the years, I have come to appreciate her views. I respect all beliefs and also believe strongly that one's religious beliefs should definitely stay out of politics."

David Groethe, former FFRF Chair 1926 – 2016

Freethought Today is very sad to report that David Groethe, 90, who was chair of FFRF's Executive Board for more than two decades, died of cancer on March 30 at his home in Pine Island, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Mary, also a longtime FFRF member and former FFRF state representative. David and Mary were very early members, joining FFRF in 1978, the year it went national. David retired from the board in 2013.

Born on Jan. 1, 1926, in Rapid City, S.D., David studied for two years at Black Hills State, then had a diverse career, most recently running a photo finishing lab in Sioux Falls, S.D. The couple remained active and traveled

around the country in retirement.

He and Mary married on Feb. 5, 1971, a second marriage for both. They had six children or stepchildren, 10 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren between them.

"He loved FFRF. It was a big part of his life," Mary told FFRF. "Religion was one of the things that always bothered him. He needed the scientific method, not a belief system."

David and Mary were cheerful fixtures at annual FFRF conventions for three decades, often volunteering to staff FFRF book tables. David and Mary attended one convention with custom-made caps embroidered with "Out of the Closet Atheist." The caps were so popular that FFRF asked permission to use the idea for its sales catalog, where they are a staple.

"We'll miss David's enthusiasm, his chuckle and his practical good sense," said Dan Barker, FFRF co-president.



Photo by Brent Nicastro

FFRF's 39th annual convention, Oct. 7-9 in Pittsburgh

Set your sights on FFRF's convention

With the Reason Rally now in the rear-view mirror, it's time to turn your freethinking attention to FFRF's annual convention.

With some of the biggest names in freethought set to speak at the 39th annual convention from Oct. 7-9 in downtown Pittsburgh, you don't want to miss out.

And, of course, don't forget about the tour of Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural masterpiece Fallingwater on the first day of the convention. (See below for details.)

FFRF has again collected an impressive list of speakers to inform, educate, entertain and amaze you.

A keynote speaker will be **Lawrence Krauss**, the internationally known theoretical physicist, author and director of the Origins Project at Arizona State University and Foundation Professor in the School of Earth and Space Exploration and the Physics Department at ASU. Krauss has won numerous international awards for both his research and his efforts to improve the public understanding of science. He is the only physicist to have received the top awards from all three U.S. physics societies, and is the author of nine books including best-sellers *The Physics of Star Trek* and *A Universe from Nothing*. Krauss starred in a feature-length documentary called "The Unbelievers," which followed



Krauss

Krauss and Richard Dawkins around the world as they discussed science and reason.

He will receive the Emperor Has No Clothes Award from FFRF.

Another keynoter will be none other than **Daniel Dennett**. He, along with Dawkins, Sam Harris and the late Christopher Hitchens, have been called the "Four Horsemen of New Atheism." Dennett is co-director of the Center for Cognitive Studies at Tufts University, is the author of many books, including *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. Dennett said the title of his convention speech will be, "Has the dam broken? Omens and worries."



Dennett

The newest honoree to the convention lineup of speakers is **Rafida Bonyah Ahmed**, a humanist activist, author and moderator at the award-winning Bengali blog Muktomona. She is the widow of Dr. Avijit Roy, a well-known writer, blogger, and activist who founded Muktomona as an online platform for Bengali-speaking freethinkers. Horrifyingly, Avijit was hacked to death by Islamic militants during a book-signing trip to Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Feb. 26, 2015, and Bonyah was gravely injured. She has been working with international and local communities to help Bengali bloggers,



Ahmed

intellectuals and activists. She was the keynote speaker for the mini-convention at the Reason Rally on June 5.

Other speakers include:

Jerry A. Coyne, professor emeritus in the Department of Ecology and Evolution at the University of Chicago, who has written 119 scientific papers and 150 popular articles, book reviews, and columns, and a trade book about the evidence for evolution — *Why Evolution is True*, which was a New York Times bestseller. His second book, *Faith vs. Fact: Why Science and Religion are Incompatible* was published in May 2015. Coyne plans to speak on the topic of "Evolution and Atheism: Best Friends Forever." He previously was honored with FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award.



Coyne

Susan Jacoby is the author of 11 books, most recently, *Strange Gods: A Secular History of Conversion*, which came out in March. Her articles have appeared frequently in the op-ed pages of The New York Times, including one in February, "Sick and Tired of 'God Bless America.'"

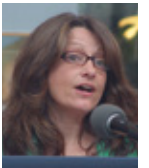


Jacoby

Jacoby is a previous recipient of FFRF's Freethought Heroine Award.

Lauri Lebo is an author, radio station owner and former reporter from

Harrisburg, Pa., where she was the principal local reporter covering the *Kitzmiller v. Dover* trial in 2004-05 while working for the York Daily Record. She was featured prominently in the *Nova* documentary *Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial*, both because of her coverage and because her father, who owned Christian radio station WWII-AM in Harrisburg, sided with the Dover school board in the controversy. After more than 20 years as a journalist, she left reporting to write *The Devil in Dover*, a book about the Kitzmiller trial and its effects on Dover.



Lebo

Honoree **Marie Schaub** is the only named plaintiff in an ongoing case near Pittsburgh. She joined FFRF in 2012 to ask the New Kensington-Arnold School District to remove a 6-foot-tall granite monument depicting a copy of the Ten Commandments that is prominently displayed in front of the public high school her child was scheduled to attend.



Schaub

FFRF Co-President **Dan Barker** will speak about his lawsuit against Congress and also about his new book, *God: The Most Unpleasant Character in Fiction*.



Barker

Hotel info

Reserve hotel rooms **now**. Individuals may call the hotel or go online to register. FFRF has reserved a block of rooms at the Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh Downtown at 600 Commonwealth Place. Room rates for FFRF guests are \$159 single or double occupancy. Phone 412-391-4600 (direct) or 888-317-0197 (toll-free). Refer to the group name "Freedom From Religion Foundation" to receive the guest rate. The cut-off date to reserve rooms is Sept. 12, but reserve now to avoid disappointment. Convention coincides with Steelers game, so rooms will go fast!

General schedule

After the optional tour of Fallingwater, there will be a reception from 3-5 p.m. with complimentary appetizers and afternoon workshops. Friday dinner is on your own.

The formal program begins at 7 p.m. Friday, ending with complimentary dessert and hot beverages. The convention resumes Saturday morning with an optional Non-Prayer Breakfast at 8 a.m. The morning program starts at 9:30 a.m. After a two-hour lunch on your own, the program resumes at 2 p.m. An optional dinner banquet will be followed by evening speaker/entertainment.

Annual meetings of the membership and the state representatives are Sunday morning, ending before noon.

Fallingwater tour

On Friday, Oct. 7, prior to the start of the convention, FFRF is hosting a tour of the impressive **Frank Lloyd Wright**-designed Fallingwater site. The \$40 ticket includes admission and coach bus transportation. There is also an optional, although highly recommended, box lunch available for \$12. (The cafeteria is expected to be too busy.) The 43-mile route to the captivating Fallingwater is through scenic Pennsylvania countryside. Buses depart from Wyndham Grand every 30 minutes beginning 7:50 a.m., with returns beginning 2:10 p.m. Expect to be gone for about 7 hours.

Extra rooms have been set aside at the Wyndham Grand for FFRF members for Thursday night for those interested in going on the tour. FFRF will assign your time.

Note: The tour can be physically challenging for some. There is a ¼-mile walk to and from the home on uneven gravel paths, a one-hour walking tour, and more than 100 steps (although not all at once). There is no wheelchair access and children under the age of 6 are not allowed.

2016 CONVENTION REGISTRATION

ONLINE: ffrf.org/outreach/convention/2016-registration

MAIL: Return with payment to: FFRF, Attn: Convention, P.O. Box 750, Madison, WI 53701

CONVENTION OCT. 7-8

FFRF members	_____ x \$60	\$_____
Non-member spouse or companion accompanying a member	_____ x \$65	\$_____
Non-members	_____ x \$105	\$_____
New-members	_____ x \$100	\$_____
Save \$5 by becoming an FFRF member. (\$40 individual membership, \$60 registration)		
Child/Student(s) – Free with copy of student ID	_____ x FREE	\$_____

FOOD

Indicate number of orders per entrée.

Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast Buffet	_____ x \$30*	\$_____
___ Grand Breakfast	___ Vegan Tofu Scramble	
___ Grand Breakfast Gluten Free	___ Vegan Tofu Scramble Gluten Free	
Saturday Night Dinner	_____ x \$45*	\$_____
___ Herb Grilled Chicken	___ Tuscan Grilled Vegetable Stack (vegetarian/vegan)	
___ Herb Grilled Chicken Gluten Free	___ Tuscan Grilled Vegetable Stack (vegetarian/vegan) Gluten Free	

*Includes 20% Gratuity & Sales Tax

FALLINGWATER FRIDAY BUS TOUR FRIDAY, OCT. 7

Bus tour and entrance fee	_____ x \$40	\$_____
Box Lunch Indicate number of orders per box lunch	_____ x \$12	\$_____
___ Turkey sandwich on whole wheat	___ Greek wrap with hummus, veggies	
___ Gluten-free chef salad		
	Total \$	_____

Name _____ Please include names of all registrants

Address _____ City / State / ZIP _____

Phone / Email _____

Contact information for in house use only.